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HEROD AND MARIAMNE.

A TRAGEDY.

BY

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ETC., ETC.

PHILADELPHIA: .

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TO MY HUSBAND.

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HEROD AND MARIAMNE.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*A hall in HEROD'S palace.*

Enter JOSEPH and SOHEMUS.

Joseph. It hath come, good Sohemus. 'T hath come.

Sohemus.

What, brother?

Jos. The king is summoned by Antonius
Unto Laodicea concerning——

Soh.

Well?

Jos. Lower, I pray you—why, concerning, sir,
The death of Aristobulus.

Soh.

Heaven save us!

What saith the queen?

Jos.

Which queen, my Sohemus?

There are so many queens in Herod's palace,
We needs must name them when we speak of them.
By Moses' beard! the wild bees have more wisdom:
They have one queen, where Herod houses four.
There is his mother Cypros, and his sister
My wife Salome: they do hate most violently
His consort Mariamne, and her mother,
The old king's daughter, Alexandra.

Soh.

Nay,

All this I know by demonstration, sir.
The information that I crave concerns
Queen Mariamne. Doth she think her brother
To have been murdered?

Jos.

There, sir, lies the matter.

She doth not think so, while her mother doth.

They have been wrangling o'er it all the morning,
And wrangle yet. My wife and Cypros sulk
Within their own apartments; and the king
Is closeted with Antony's messenger.

Soh. Where is Hyrcanus?

Jos. Sleeping, sir, I think.

The kind old king hath but that refuge now
When the queens quarrel.

Soh. A most fitting refuge!

For when queens quarrel kings are kings in vain.
Soft, friend! is that not Mariamne's voice?

Jos. It is,—and Alexandra's. Let us go,
Ere we be dragged into their mad dispute.

[*Exeunt.*]

Enter MARIAMNE and ALEXANDRA.

Alex. Art thou my daughter?

Mar. If thou dost tell truth.

Alex. Insolence! Wilt thou mock me? God of Moses!
Almost I think that I unknowing lie
And that thou art a changeling! Sure no blood
Of mine makes blue those traitorous veins o' thine!
To call him brother, and yet love the king
Who murdered him!

Mar. Madam, I will not think it.

Alex. Not think it? Will not think it!

Mar. No, madam.

Nor hear it said. Therefore be silent.

Alex. Silent!

This unto me, thy mother? Silent? Oh,
Would I were tongued like nature! thou shouldst hear
A hundred thousand voices utter, "Murder!"
Why, I do tell thee I have knowledge of it
From ten reliable sources. It was planned—
Ay, planned from first to last. And he, thy brother,
So young, so fair, that even thou didst show
Old and uncomely by his side!

Mar. Good mother,
None loved my brother more than I did love,
And love him: therefore go I quietly,
Thinking how did he live he would prefer
That we should mourn him, not with cries and curses,
But in the stillness of our hearts with prayer.

Alex. Prayers for his murderer? Oh, 'tis well! 'tis well!
Thou art so eaten with unnatural love
For this thy kingly sinner, that thy heart
Hath no unoccupied cranny where might lodge
Love natural for him whom he hath murdered.

Mar. I will not hear that word again.

Alex. Not hear it?

Canst command deafness, that thou wilt not hear it?

I say that Herod hath thy brother murdered,—
Murdered! Ay, murdered! murdered! Dost thou hear?
Or, being queen, canst thou command thy ears
That they drink not unwelcome sounds?

Mar. Ay, madam;

But I can twenty hands command to take thee
Where thy voice cannot reach my ears.

Alex. Ay, do it!

Do it, I say! 'Twere well that Herod's wife
Took Herod's way; 'twere well Hyrcanus' daughter
Should be o'er-daughtered in Hyrcanus' palace;
'Twere well the blood of Aristobulus
Should not cry out, lest Herod seeking sleep
Should be disturbed. O God of Israel,
God of the widowed and the childless, hear!
To Thee I turn, to Thee shall mount my grief;
Thine ears shall drink this murder, and Thine arm
Destroy the murderer.

Mar. Madam, have done.

Alex. Have done! Have done, didst say? When hell is
finished,

Packed full, and the gates locked against new-comers,
I will have done.—O Aristobulus,
This was thy sister, and is wife to him
Who had thee murdered.

Mar. Mother, be advised.

My duty as thy daughter hath a limit.

Alex. Thy duty unto Herod hath no limit.

What! wilt thou take his hand, lie by his side,
Be mother of his children, and the blood
Of the high-priest thy brother red between ye?
I tell thee, woman, thou wilt know my pangs
When thou hast brought forth sons for him to slay!

Mar. Mother, here comes the king! 'Twere best indeed
He did not hear thee.

Alex. Ay, now it were best;

But there will come a time, I tell you, girl,
He'll curse the day that he was born with ears!

Mar. In truth, you'd best be silent.

Alex. I will go;

Fear not but that I'll go. God blast these eyes
If ever they are willing witnesses
Unto thy dalliance with Herod!

[*Exit.*

Mar. Nay,

God knows I loved my brother, and do mourn him
With a sore heart; but when my mother thus
Doth lay his death upon the king my husband,
She doth divide my pity with her hate,
And makes my grief half Herod's. Ay, by heaven!
Though he be rash, hot-natured, mad in wrath,

And prone to take occasion by the throat,
 He is as little capable of murder
 As this my heart of killing the great love
 That I do bear him. Ah, he comes, and anger
 Hot at his heels !

Enter HEROD.

Herod. [*Not seeing MARIAMNE.*] Herod commanded by a
 Roman turn-coat !

Antony summon Herod ! Antony,—
 The by-word of all nations, the last toy
 Of an Egyptian wanton ! Who that reads
 In future ages will believe it ? Oh
 That Antony had summoned me in person !
 The Egyptian harlot had been loverless
 In less time than she takes to make a kiss.—
 Ah, Mariamne !

Mar. Shall I stay, my lord ?

Her. Hath Herod ever bid thee from him ?

Mar. No.

But I can well imagine that this summons
 Hath left thee with a love of loneliness.

Her. Come close. Give me thine eyes. Dost think with
 Antony

Concerning this affair ?

Mar. With Antony ?

Her. Ay,—that thy brother's blood is on my hands.
 Thou dost not think it ?

Mar. As I live, my lord,
 If I do think it, let me live no longer.

Her. Then I care not who thinks it. Mariamne,
 I am not Herod when I am with thee.

Mar. What then, my lord ?

Her. Why, Mariamne's lover.
 I am no longer king, no longer soldier,
 No longer conqueror, unless in truth
 I rule thy heart.

Mar. Thou knowest that my heart
 Is but thy throne.

Her. Let me be king of thee,
 And God is welcome to the sway of heaven.

Mar. Do not blaspheme.

Her. Away ! thy veins run milk
 And make thy heart a baby. Not blaspheme !
 Love cannot utter blasphemy, for Love
 Is his own god and king of his own heaven.
 Well, dost thou love me ?

Mar. Thou dost know I do.

Her. Thou dost not ! Thou dost make a pet of Duty,
 And fatten him on what should be my food.

Love me? Not thou! Thou lovest the cold peace
That's child of frozen virtue. I have fire
To melt the Sphinx, but not to warm the blood
Of one chaste woman.

Mar. Chaste I am, my lord,
Yet for that chasteness do but better love thee.

Her. I tell thee no! Thou dost but use the word
To play with, as a child its father's sword.
Thou hast ne'er seen it scarlet with joy's death,
Or smoking with the heart's blood of a thought.
What! thou lie 'wake o' nights? Thou scorch thy brain
With bootless wishing? Thou eat pictured lips?
Thou feed regret with memory, and then rage
Because he is not satisfied? Thou love?
Nay, girl, the sun will set the sea afire
Ere thy cool heart be set aflame with love.
Moreover, look you, sooner shall the waves
Of that same ocean cool the thirsty sun
Than thy pale humor make me moderate.

Mar. I would not have thee love me less.

Her. Thou wouldst not?
Why dost thou shrink, then? Look how thou dost pale
And redden when I touch thee. Come, thine eyes,
Thine arms, thy lips, still shrinking? Israel's God!
Shall Herod coax his lawful wife for favors?
I say thou dost not love me, yea, moreover,
That thou dost lie when thou wouldst have me think
Thou dost not blame me for thy brother's death.
I know thou thinkest that I had him slain.

Mar. I do not think it, Herod. Dost thou think
I would be here if I believed it?

Her. Where,
Where wouldst thou be, then? Not here, say'st thou?
Where then? Speak, woman! where?

Mar. Why, dead, maybe;
But not with thee.

Her. Thou liest! Didst thou die,
I'd have thy body brought into my chamber
And make my bed thy sepulchre.

Mar. Ay, Herod,
My body, but not me. Nay, my dear lord,
Why waste such moments as are left in strife
And harsh dissension? Soon thou wilt be gone,
And Mariamne but a recollection.
Why dost thou doubt me? Why should I not love thee,
Who art the chief of men and lovers? Nay,
If, as thou sayest, I shrink, it is because
My love doth fear the violence of thy love,
Not I thyself,—not Mariamne Herod.

Her. Love is not blind, as the Greeks fable it,

For he doth look from these fair eyes o' thine,
Else am I Pleasure's bondman.

Mar. Nay, not so.
Thou'rt husband to the truest wife in Jewry.

Her. And the least loving.

Mar. Wilt thou wrong me still?
I know not how to dress out love in words.
I can but tell thee o'er and o'er again
The naked fact, I love thee.

Her. Would to heaven
I knew what loving means to thee!

Mar. I'll tell thee:
It means to put myself beyond myself,
To think of him I love in that self's stead,
To be sleep's enemy because of him,
Because of him to be the friend of pain,
To have no thought, no wish, no dream, no memory,
That is not servant to him; to forget
All earlier loves in his,—all hates, all wrongs;
Being meek to him, though proud unto all others;
Gentle to him, though to all others harsh;
To him submissive, though unto high heaven
Something rebellious. Last, to keep my patience
And bear his doubts, who have his children borne.

Her. Enough, enough. Thou most magnificent
Of queens and women, I will never doubt thee
After to-day.

Mar. Alas, my lord, to-morrow—
To-morrow'll be to-day.

Her. I will not doubt thee
So long as I do live.

Mar. Oh that thou wouldst not!
Doubt is the shaft wherewith Love wounds himself:
Doubt me no more, and be no more unhappy.

Her. Alas! unhappiness doth wait below
To ride with me, seeing I must leave thee, love,
And that for such a summons! Jewry's throne!
Antony summon me? It is as though
The dog did whistle for his master.

Mar. Ay,
It is most insolent. But need'st thou go?
Is it imperative?

Her. More than thou knowest.
Let us not talk of it. Tell me thou'lt miss me.
How wilt thou spend the hours when I am gone?

Mar. In wishing for the hour when thou'lt return.

Her. God's heart! how I do love thee!—Ha! a step!
Curséd be any that doth interrupt us,
Though it be mine own mother!

Mar. [*Starting away from him.*] 'Tis thy mother.

Love me not in her presence, lest she hate me
The more for thy much loving.

Enter CYPROS.

Cyp. Good my son,
Thy horses wait for thee.

Her. Do thou likewise.
Seest thou not that I am occupied?

Cyp. A wife should urge her husband to his duty,—
Not keep him from it.

Her. Out! Such musty maxims
Affront the air. Leave me. I'll send for thee
When I desire thee.

Cyp. Madam, wilt thou hear this
And say no word?

Her. Think'st thou that I'll hear that
And say no word? Depart o' the instant!

Mar. Nay,
I'll wait below. Thy mother hath some message,—
Some special word for thee. I will be there,
Fear not, to give thee my last love and blessing.
Now let me leave thee, as I love thee.

Her. Go, then.

Mar. Why dost thou say't so harshly?

Her. If thou lovedst me
Thou wouldst not be so ready to be gone.

Mar. Doubt'st me again? Remember what thou saidst
A moment past, and to thy word be true.

Her. Well, go. I will believe thee. [*Exit MAR.*]

How now, mother?

What reason shall make good of this offence
To plead thy pardon?

Cyp. Love, my son.

Her. What love
Can pardon plead for interrupting mine?
Thy love, sayest thou? The love of all the mothers
Back counted unto Eve, and smelted down
In one huge mass, would not so much as make
My love a weapon.

Cyp. Then I'll say my pride,
Which guards thy dignity as 'twere mine own.

Her. My dignity?

Cyp. Thy honor and thy dignity.

Her. My dignity? My honor? Quick, give word!
What wouldst thou touch?

Cyp. But that which touches thee.

Her. My honor! By the throne of God, thy honor
Shall not survive this moment of thy speaking,
If thou hast played with me.

Cyp. Nay, good my son,

Think you a woman so infirm as I
Would take a lion-whelp for plaything? Nay,
Did I upon my knees approach the throne
Of great Jehovah, I were not more serious.

Her. What then? Give word. Who is it? Hath some one
Proved treacherous in the household?

Cyp. Ay,—the one
Who should above all else be faithful.

Her. What!
Joseph?—my treasurer?—thy son-in-law?
What hath he done? Speak, madam: I've no time
To tarry information.

Cyp. Nay, not Joseph.

Her. Not Joseph? Then 'tis Sohemus. By heaven!
Trust hath denied herself if he be false!

Cyp. Neither is Sohemus the guilty one.

Her. Who is it, then? Delay no longer, woman.
I'll have it, though it blast me! Who is it?

Cyp. Mayhap I had best tell thee the offence
Ere naming the offender?

Her. No, I say,
I'll hear the name. Who is it?

Cyp. Mariamne.

Her. Thou liest! Dost thou hear? Thou liest! Stop!
Keep from me. Come not near me. Thou'rt my mother,
But tempt me not with nearness,—tempt me not.
Dost know what 'tis to anger Herod? Answer!
What! Mariamne? Mariamne false?
How false? False to my bed? Were this proved false,
I'd have thee burned to warm her bedchamber!
False? Mariamne? How? With whom? How false?
Down on thy knees and swear it!

Cyp. I do swear it.
But she is false only in thought, not deed.

Her. In thought? In thought? How canst thou know her
thought?
This is a lie, and thou shalt die for it.
—Without, there!

Cyp. Herod, hear me. Call no witness
Unto thy shame.

Her. My shame? Away! Away!

Cyp. Salome'll prove it.

Her. Though great God Himself
Came down as witness, I would not believe it!

Cyp. My son, if thou wouldst only let me speak——

Her. Speak, then. But I do warn thee that thy life
Hangs in the balance. One thin thread of gold
From Mariamne's temple would outweigh it.

Cyp. I have had certain knowledge that thy wife
Hath sent her picture——

Her. Ah?

Cyp. To Antony.

Her. Woman, dost thou crave death, that thus thou tempt'st it?
To Antony? To Antony? Her picture?
Hath sent her picture to Mark Antony,
The Egyptian harlot's lover? She, my wife,
The queen of Jewry? Mariamne? She,
The wife of Herod? Oh, if thou hast lied,
I'll have thy heart cut out and thrown straightway
Beneath the feet of Mariamne!

Cyp. Nay,
Thou sham'st thyself, my son, more than thou dost thy mother,
To give thy wrath the rein. I have had word.
I know the thing I speak. Salome, too,
Doth know it.

Her. That she hath her picture sent
Unto Mark Antony?

Cyp. Ev'n so.

Her. That she——
God! she shall come herself and answer this.

Cyp. Not so; but wait until thou art arrived
In Laodicea, and then, in off-hand manner,
Bring up the subject to Mark Antony,
Or Gallius, or some one of his picked friends,
But carelessly, as though thou found'st it matter
For mirth.

Her. Ha! now I see why Antony
Hath summoned me.

Cyp. For what, my son?

Her. For what?
To take my life, that he may take my wife!
I see it all. It is a plot between them.
I see it! Ha! ha! ha!

Cyp. Is this a time for laughter, Herod?
Beseech you, quietly. At what dost laugh?

Her. I laugh to think how I will foil them, madam!
Where's Joseph? Where is Sohemus?

Cyp. My son,
Sure thou wilt not word this to Sohemus,—
To Joseph?

Her. I will word it to Beelzebub
If it doth pleasure me! Out of my way!
Oh, I will play into their hands! I'll aid them!
I'll make them merry! Ha! ha! ha! Oh, I'll make them
merry! [*Exit, laughing.*]

Enter SALOME.

Sal. Why laughed my brother?

Cyp. At what should he laugh?
A Herod laughs where a mere man would weep.

Sal. Hast told him of the picture?

Cyp.

Ay.

Sal.

What said he?

Cyp. He laughed, and asked me where thy husband was.

Sal. Asked thee where Joseph was?

Cyp.

Ay.

Sal.

God above!

This will ruin all. Joseph would take her part
Against great heaven.

Cyp.

But he cannot deny 't.

Sal. He'll find some means to soothe him.

Cyp.

Well, so be it.

I've done all in my power to ruin her.

Sal. Insolent vixen! I would give one-half
Of my young life, could I but spend the other
In watching her abasement.

Cyp.

Soft! Come on.

Herod returns this way.

[*Exeunt.*]

Enter HEROD and JOSEPH.

Jos. What! Sent her picture to Mark Antony?
Thy mother told thee this? Wilt thou believe it?

Her. Whether or not I do believe it, uncle,
I've a command for thee.

Jos. In all, my liege,
I'll prove obedient.

Her. Thou knowest, sir,
This summons is a dangerous one.

Jos. My lord,
God's kingdom watches over Israel's kings.

Her. But Israel's God hath naught to do, good uncle,
With Roman Antony. Look! this command
Is one most sacred.

Jos. I will keep it, sire,
As mine own soul.

Her. Then, Joseph, if that Antony
Doth take my life, do thou take Mariamne's;
For even in death I would not be without her.

Jos. Dear my lord——

Her. Say no word. Thou hast thy orders.

Jos. But kill her, sire?—thy queen, whom thou so lovest?

Her. 'Tis for that reason I would have her slain.

Jos. But sure, my lord, this is a savage love.

Her. As savage as the heart it quickens. Look, sir!
Thou wilt be faithful?

Jos. As unto my God.

Her. [*Taking off a ring.*] Thus, then, I seal thee to me.
Wear this ring,
And never look on it but what thou thinkest
Of that which thou art sworn to.

Jos.

I'll remember.

Her. Commend me to my mother and thy wife,
Also to Alexandra and Hyrcanus.
My queen doth wait for me without. Farewell.
Remember thou art sealed to this.

Jos.

My lord,

Death will forget ere I do.

Her.

Then farewell.

[*Exit.*

Jos. How he doth love her ! Yet a love more cruel
Than hottest hate. I know not, on my soul,
If Herod's hate or Herod's love be crueller.
Ay, to be Herod's wife were punishment
Enough for a she-angel grown rebellious,
Where Lucifer was hurled into a hell.
Sealed to his orders ? Sealed unto a murder !
Yet he hath ever used me kindly,—ay,
With trust and courtesy. It is this love,
Which makes a madman even of a king,
That hath so spurred him. Now would unto heaven
Salome did not so abhor the queen !
For, though imperious, she is a woman
To win the liking even of a woman.
She send her picture to Mark Antony !
Why, sooner would she scar her wondrous beauty
Than so unveil it to the eyes of lust.
She send the fool of Cleopatra love-tokens !
Nay, let the sea turn traitor to the moon
And fill some reedy pond for love ! Well, well,
Her innocence doth wait to welcome him
In Laodicea.

[*Exit.**Enter ALEXANDRA and HYRCANUS.*

Alex. What, father ! thou art with this Herod too ?
Thou think'st him guiltless ? Thou canst speak of him
With kindness, and thy only grandson dead
At his command ? Oh, are there mothers in heaven
Who have so suffered upon earth ? If so,—
If any such there be, to them I kneel,
To them cry out, to them denounce this Herod !

Hyr. My daughter, thou hast heavy grief to bear.

Alex. Help me to bear it, then ! Take thou thy share,
And help me to my vengeance ! Thou art king,
Thou art the king of Jewry,—not this Herod,
This low-born conqueror, this thief o' crowns,
This son of scorned Antipater ! Oh, I marvel
That thou canst eat, and drink, and sleep, and wake,
And call thyself Hyrcanus, and yet bear it !
Whence came his greatness ? Whence his power ? Yea,
And whence his crown ? The first two were thy gifts,
The third he stole to show his gratitude !

What, sire ! wilt thou endure 't, wilt sit so calm
 While Fortune strips thee to make rich this traitor ?
 Rise, be a king once more ; nay, be a man !
 Appeal unto the people ; they do love thee.
 Resume thy throne, resume thy dignity,
 Denounce this Herod ! Seize this Herod ! Slay this Herod !

Hyr. More gently, good my daughter. I am old.

Alex. Ay, old in patience ! Make me but thine heir,
 And I'll defy him.

Hyr. Nay, I crave but peace
 As pillow for my age. My time to rule
 Is past, and Time is ruler over me.
 Believe me, thou dost somewhat wrong the man.
 He is ambitious, but hath not kept all
 Of this my kingdom.

Alex. What ! not all ? Not all ?
 Oh, noble generosity ! Not all ?
 Thy kingdom is thy spouse, and is there beggar
 So lost that he would share with any man
 His lawful wife ? Hyrcanus, O my father,
 By thy white hairs I charge thee honor them
 And give them back their crown !

Hyr. Dear daughter, patience.
 Had I the wish, the means were not with me.

Alex. Take thou thy part, and God will give thee means.
 Oh, would I were Hyrcanus, and a man !
 Thou soon shouldst see this Herod made a slave !

Hyr. Hast thou forgot he is thy daughter's husband ?

Alex. Forgotten it ! Though memory were worn
 So full of gaps 'twould not hold yesterday,
 That should be recollected ! What ! forgotten
 A Herod's blood doth mingle in the veins
 That should be clogged with it as with some poison ?
 That my grandchildren are half Herod ?—she,
 My child, their willing mother ? No, O God !
 When I forget this thing, forget Thou me !

Enter CYPROS and SALOME.

Cyp. Madam, thou dost talk loudly for a palace.

Alex. Madam, thou dost talk pertly for a commoner.

Cyp. How ! Commoner ! The mother of King Herod ?

Alex. Common for that, if not a commoner.

Cyp. Insolent shrew ! dost not thou fear to word me ?

Alex. Insolent citizen ! dost not thou fear
 To word me ?

Sal. Madam, best you have a care.

Hyr. Ay, good my daughter, pray you guard your tongue.
 Who rouses Hate must look for hell to follow.
 Come with me.

Alex. Nay, not I. Let these go forth,
If they would not be worded.

Cyp. We go forth
At thy command? Let God obey the devil.
Go thou forth, shrew.

Alex. Let God obey the devil,
For I will not.

Sal. Dost thou insinuate?

Cyp. Ay, dost thou dare?

Hyr. Good Cypros, good Salome,
Good Alexandra——

Alex. Ay, call evil good!
It is thy trade, since thou'st called Herod generous.

Cyp. The king shall hear of this on his return.
Ay, instantly!

Alex. He hath not yet departed.
Here is the lawful king of Israel [*points to HYRCANUS*],
And here his daughter.

Cyp. Herod shall know of this.

Alex. Ay, tell the shoe that the foot chafes with it.
Do, gentle commoner; do, citizen; Cypros, do.

Hyr. Oh, daughter, daughter, you do dig a pit
And rush into it.—Please you, madam, patience.

Cyp. Dost tell me patience? Thou hast heard her? Come,
Salome: if the king be not yet gone,
He shall have word of this.

Sal. Ay, as I live!

[*Exeunt SALOME and CYPROS.*]

Hyr. Oh, woe is me, my daughter, that my life
May not glide onward stilly to its silence,
But thus by words be lashed into a storm
To toss this frail old bark that bears my soul.
Canst thou not feign a peace, though set for war?
Surely thou need'st not use such taunting terms
As those with which thou hast just heaped the mother
And sister of the king.

Alex. The king again?
And thou dost call him king? More sovereignty
There is in this my tender woman's body
Than e'er was topped by thy lost diadem.
Let us begone. The very air's infected
That they have breathed.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.—*Before the palace gates.*

MARIAMNE, with her two sons, ALEXANDER and ARISTOBULUS.

Mar. How long he tarries! Run, my boys, run quickly,
And see if ye can glimpse him. [*Exeunt boys.*]

This delay
Hath signs that make me fearful. What if Cypros

Hath poured some falsehood in his jealous ears
To poison love? He's here. I'll meet him. Well,

Enter HEROD.

At last thou'rt come, my lord.

Alex. [*Running to his mother.*] Oh, mother, mother!
He flung me from him, that I tripped and fell!

Mar. Herod, was this well done?—Hush, hush, my boy:
King's sons weep not for scratches.—Good my lord,
Wilt thou not answer?

Her. 'Tis a comely boy.
Think you that Antony could father better?

Mar. Mark Antony? How should I know, my lord?

Her. How shouldst thou know? That's well, that's very well.
How shouldst thou know? Ay, ay, there is the riddle
The Sphinx hath failed to answer. 'Tis for that
He turns from Egypt for its solving.

Mar. Sire,
Thou art in merry mood for sad occasion.
Goest thou in truth to Antony?

Her. Ay, madam.
Wilt thou come with me?

Mar. No, not if I could.

Her. Ha? Wherefore not?

Mar. Because I'm weary, Herod,
Of thy fierce humors.

Her. Weary of my humors?
Weary of me? Thou wilt confess it, then,
Unto my face?

Mar. I said not I was weary
Of thee, but of thy humors. As to that,
When they do touch me only, I can bear them;
But when they touch my children, I am roused
Above submission. See how thou'st bruised him, sir!
And he doth look to thee as unto God,
And loves thee above God,—ay, worships thee,—
And thus thou usest him!

Her. Come to me, boy.
Thy mother, doth she speak the truth?

Alex. Ay, sire,
My mother always speaks the truth.

Her. So! does she?
Thou lov'st me, then?

Alex. Yes, sire.

Her. With all thy heart?

Alex. With all that's not my mother's.

Her. Dost not know
Herod will not take part of anything?
Well, tremble not. So! Let me see thine eyes:
What color are they?

Alex. Mother saith, like thine.

Her. Ay, doth she? Look! how wouldst thou like a brother
With Roman eyes?

Alex. What are they like, my lord?

Her. Like Antony's.

Alex. Is that the Antony

My mother talks of?

Her. Dost thou say so, boy?

Doth she talk of him? Soft, soft, soft! no tears!

This Antony thy mother talks of,—soft!

No tears, I tell thee,—come, what doth she say

Of Antony?

Alex. That he's a bad, bad Roman,

Who hath sent here to take thee from us.

Her. Hold!

Look at me. Thou hast honest eyes.

Mar. [*Coming forward.*] Ay, Herod,

And he is honest. Wilt thou doubt thy son,

As well as her who mothered him?—Sweet boy,

Come close to me.—Why should he not be honest?

He is Hyrcanus' grandson, and the son

Of Mariamne.

Her. Not of Herod?

Mar. Now

Shame on thee, doubting king! I will bear all

But that which slurs my honor. Darest thou stand,

Look in my eyes, and hint me wanton? No,

Thou dost not dare to do it.—Come, my sons,

These are no words to fill your innocent ears:

Bid God-speed to the king your father.

Alex. Sire,

God speed thee on thy journey.

Aris. God be with thee.

Mar. Farewell, my lord. God be with thee indeed,

To mend thy doubting heart. [*Exit with her sons.*]

Her. Stay, Mariamne!

No, I'll not call her back to melt resolve

With love's quick fire. I will be firm in this.

And yet was guilt ne'er foreheaded like that.

The child, too, said that she named Antony

But to abuse him. Yet that is no proof,—

He may have been instructed so to speak.

I will proceed unto the truth in person.

How if it were some trick? My mother hates her,—

Salome too. But then they dared not trick me;

Moreover, they do know that proof awaits me

Whether of their dishonesty or truth.

Be that as 't may, if she hath sent her picture

Unto Mark Antony, by Israel's God,

I'll send her to his wanton as a slave!

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*Laodicea. A room in ANTONY'S house.**Enter ANTONY and HEROD.*

Ant. Nay, say no more about it. I'm content
Unto the full with what thou'st told me. Tut!
I might have known 'twas woman's babble.

Her. Ay,

These women that are kin to those we love!
Methinks that Satan was a married man,
And his wife's mother egged him to rebel,
Seeing that heaven would not hold them both.

Ant. Well said! Well said! Thou hast the trick o' humor.
Thou canst trim old facts with invention, sir,
Until they seem not worn. Thou'lt be well missed
In Laodicea. But look you; it is said
Arabia doth not give willing tribute.
How's that?

Her. Thou'st tapped a cedar, Antony,
And look for it to give forth balsam.

Ant. So?
Arabia's king is niggardly?

Her. Good sooth,
As covetous of his gold as Earth herself,
And tighter holds it.

Ant. So? I have heard as much
From Cleopatra. What's the tribute? Know you?

Her. It was two hundred talents, but of late
It has been less,—considerably less.

Ant. Less? That's not well,—not well. I like not that.
I have no time to war against Arabia.
Two hundred talents? That rich country's veins
Could spare ten hundred drops o' gold, nor beat
One pulse-stroke weaker. If there must be war——

Her. Well?

Ant. If there must be war, I'll look to thee
To manage it.

Her. So be it. [*Aside.*] He shrinks from murder
Of one alone, but to secure his death
Would order thousands unto theirs.

Ant. [*Muttering.*] 'Tis pity.
'Tis pity. I'd not have it so. [*Rousing.*] What say you?

Her. Nothing.

Ant. If there be war, I look to thee,
Remember.

Her. I'll remember.

Ant. Hold a little,
There are some papers,—those I told thee of.
Wait for me here.

[*Exit ANTONY.*]

Her. Thou Roman hypocrite!
 Wait for thee? Ay, I'll wait, I'll wait. Fear not
 But that I'll wait. Thou cunning plot-maker!
 Make war against Arabia? Thou'dst make war
 Against red hell, if Satan's wife were comely.
 And yet this man doth take my hand and clasp me
 His closest friend, speak of the things that irk him,
 Quote Cæsar freely, whistle Cæsar's Rome
 Into my Jewish ears, make light or serious
 As the mood takes him; and doth brood withal
 O'er schemes to have me butchered. Israel's God,
 If such is friendship, be not Thou my friend!
 Here comes the Roman lover o' Jews' wives.

Enter ANTONY.

Ant. Here are the papers: please you look at them:
 They can be sealed again. Note this, and this,
 And this particularly. Is't not strange?
 Here, too, is something strikes me inconsistent,
 And here again. Dost thou return to-day?
 I do not willing spare thee.

Her. And I go
 Less willingly for thy unwillingness.
 When shall I look to welcome thee, my lord,
 In Jewry?

Ant. Why, ere very long, I trust,
 If all works as I'd have it.

Her. [*Aside.*] Ay, ay, ay
 If all works as thou'dst have it. Verily
 I do believe thee.

Ant. What say'st?

Her. That these errors
 Are strange indeed. Who drew up these reports?

Ant. Athenion.

Her. With his own hand?

Ant. I think so.

Her. Best thou madest certain. Then thou'lt come to Jewry,
 If all doth work as thou wouldst have it, sir?

Ant. Indeed, most joyously.

Her. Be sure o' that.

Ant. What, Herod?

Her. That thou'lt come most joyously.

Ant. Why, I am sure of it.

Her. Sure?

Ant. What's the matter?
 Thou makest a mountain of this mole-hill.

Her. Ay,
 But 'twere a task as difficult, Antony,
 To make a mole-hill of a mountain.

Ant. Well,
Thou'rt in strange mood to-day. And thou wilt go?

Her. Ay, Antony.

Ant. I do suspect thee, friend——

Her. Of what?

Ant. Of being somewhat in my plight.
There is one only difference.

Her. And that?

Ant. Thou callest thy Cleopatra Mariamne.

Her. Antony!

Ant. What! So moved at the mere name?

Her. Not at the name, but at the way of naming:
Name not the wife of Herod and thy wanton
In the same breath.

Ant. How, sir!

Her. Yes, I repeat it,
And do but ask what I myself fulfil.
Thou hast ne'er heard me name Octavia
In such connection.

Ant. By the gods! thy pride
Would make Jove's throne its footstool! Have a care!
Dost brave me?

Her. Thou mayst call it as thou wilt,
The fact remains, I will not have my queen
Come near thy wanton, even in a sentence.

Ant. Gods, sir!

Her. I know I'm in thy power. Yet, Roman,
I've done but what in my place thou hadst done.

Ant. Well—well—well—well. She's fair enough, in truth,
To make a lover even of a Herod.

Her. How dost thou know she's fair? By hearsay?

Ant. Ay,
By hearsay and by demonstration both.
I have her picture.

Her. [*Calmly and with tightened lips.*] Ah! thou hast her
picture?

Ant. And well done, too. One Procrius, a Greek,
Hath limned it. I have oft bethought me, sir,
That thou shouldst have it.

Her. [*More calmly and more rigid.*] Hast thou so, indeed?

Ant. Ay, from the hour I knew it had been sent
By Alexandra, I did purpose to——

Her. By Alexandra! God! by Alexandra?
Didst thou say Alexandra?

Ant. Ay. What then?

Her. Did Alexandra send it to thee? Speak!
Hyrcanus' daughter, Alexandra?

Ant. Ay.

What, man! art going mad?—Without, there! ho!
Wine! Water! Anything to drink! Wine, there!

Her. [*Aside.*] (And I have doubted her, have thought her false,

Bid her a cold farewell.) I cry you grace.
Give me to drink some water. No, not wine!
Water, I tell you! 'Tis the air, I think,
The closeness of the day. Notice me not.
The picture, thou dost say, was sent to thee
By Alexandra?

Ant. Ay, by Alexandra.

Her. Dost thou know, Antony, I lied just now?

Ant. Lied?

Her. Lied! I gave thee, friend, to understand
That my wife's mother stood not in my love.

Ant. And so thou didst.

Her. Well, hear me, Antony:
Before the one great God of Israel,
I dote upon her!

Ant. Well, of all thy moods
This is the strangest.

Her. Yet the welcomest;
Look you,—the picture,—can I see it now?

Ant. I will go bring it to thee.

Her. I'm thy debtor. [*Exit ANTONY.*
Oh, Mariamne, Mariamne, Mariamne!
Thou shalt set foot upon my neck for this,
Loll on my throne, and take my diadem
To girdle thee.

And I did bid her cold farewell, and thus
Am one kiss short for all eternity!
And the boy, too,—I hurt him. A brave boy,
So proud he would not weep, although I gripped him
To hurt one tougher by a good ten years.
A valiant boy. And she so fierce for him;
Ay, ay, she hurt me well for hurting him.
Oh, I'll invent some higher name than prince
To give her sons!

Good Joseph!—he believed in her. Now, truth,
I am half envious of Joseph's goodness.
But he shall not outdo me after this:
Herod the king shall as a warning take
Herod the husband. Yet without a cause
I was not jealous. No, by Jewry's throne,
I was not jealous without cause! My mother—
Ay, but she did not lie in everything.
No, Alexandra, Alexandra, she—
Hyrcanus' daughter! Ha! there's mischief here,
Though of a different temper. She to send
The picture of my wife to Antony?
To Antony? Ah, let me think on this!
This hath, in truth, a twang of treachery,

False, scheming Jezebel ! Yet I'll forgive her,
That 'twas herself, not Mariamne,—yea,
Not Mariamne ! But she must to prison,—
To prison, for a time at least.

Enter ANTONY.

Ant. Here is the picture : it is something rough
In certain parts : a taking roughness, though.

Her. Ay, ay, 'tis like, 'tis very like : her eyes
Unto an eyelash, yet not to an eyelash :
There's margin here for the imagination
To make perfection out of, almost. Why,
I like it for its lack o' sleekness, man.
'Tis only God who can afford to finish !
'Tis like her, but as sunlight's like the sun.
The color's here, but not the radiance.
I thank thee, Antony. This thought o' thine
Shall father many deeds. As to Arabia,
I will do all that thou couldst there desire :
Fear not the issue. Now give me the papers ;
Thou hast not sealed them, though. Here is a lamp ;
Despatch, I pray thee, for I must begone ;
Or shall I seal them ?

Ant. Oh, I'll do it for thee.
Gaze on thy pictured queen in peace meantime.
As to the tribute from Arabia,
'Tis in thy hands. All such auxiliaries
As thou didst purpose for my army's strengthening,
Take in this cause if needs be so. These papers
Are now as tight as is my trust in thee,
And, like that trust, stamped with my seal. Commend me
Unto thy queen, thy mother, and thy household ;
Farewell, if thou wilt go.

Her. I must, my friend.
In everything depend on me.

Ant. I will.

Her. Then, once more thanking thee as to this matter,
The likeness of my queen, farewell.

Ant. Farewell. [*Exit HEROD.*]

'Twas well imagined. Ay, 'twill serve a turn.
Fate hath by this woven his very heart-strings
Into the pattern of my destiny.
He will remember I returned that picture,
Where, otherwise, myself would be forgot.
Ah, well, so goes it. Yet, as I'm a Roman,
'Twere almost worth my while to turn a Jew
Could I by so becoming fall in love
With mine own lawful spouse. Yet, after all,
The Jews' God is a bachelor, therefore wise
In that respect above our Roman Jove :

There's nothing quicker rouses envious spleen
Than to behold a man who's deep in love
With his own wife!

[*Exit.*]

SCENE II.—*A room in HEROD's palace.*

Enter JOSEPH and SALOME.

Jos. Ay, madam, I repeat it,—I repeat it ;
I know thou art my wife, and I repeat it.
God wot, I know that thou'rt my lawful wife,
And yet I do repeat it. Heaven witness
That I remember Cypros is thy mother,
Thyself my wife Salome, yet again
I do repeat it : ye are both unjust,
Unwise, unwomanly, in this your hatred
Of noble Mariamne.

Sal. Sir, be warned :
Thou hadst best guard thy tongue.

Jos. Do thou, then, wife,
Set me example.

Sal. This to me?—to me?

Jos. This unto any one who hates the queen.
I say 'twas base in thee to run to Herod
With this tale of the picture. Ay, moreover,
That I will ne'er believe she knew 'twas sent,
Till Raphael be commissioned so to say!

Sal. Sir, I do tell thee——

Jos. Madam, I tell thee
I will not rest till this be set at rights.
She send her picture to Mark Antony!
She would as soon have Satan for a lover.
Ay, that I'll swear to. She to send her picture!
Salome, in God's name—all praise be His!—
Wherefore, in God's name, as I said, do ye,
Your mother and yourself, so hate the queen?

Sal. Wherefore? Didst say wherefore? Thou dost observe
her,
Her insolence, her arrogance, her scorn,
Her sideward smiles, her upward eyebrows, ay,
Her hints and innuendoes, and then ask
Wherefore? Away! Thou art so blind with doting
Upon this virtuous queen, thou canst not see
When she insults thy wife.

Jos. I can well see
When that my wife insults me. Come, be careful :
No more o' that.

Sal. No more of what?

Jos. Of that
I shame to mention,—how much more to hear!
Woman, see that thou dost not drop again
Into such wicked hinting. Nay, no word :

I will not hear it. God protect the queen
 From thy tongue's venom ! In the mean time, I,
 Being His servant, will do what I can
 To keep her happy. Nay, I tell thee, peace.
 I will not hear so much as one foul word
 Against Queen Mariamne !

Sal. Will not ?

Jos. Ay,
 Will not.

Sal. Thou wilt not hear me speak ? Thou ?—thou ?
 Thou wilt not hear me speak ?—Salome ?—me ?—
 Thy wife, and Herod's sister ?

Jos. Herod's self
 Should not to me insult his queen.

Sal. Out, slave !

Jos. Slave, maybe, but unchained. Therefore be still.
 Here comes the queen herself.

Sal. [*Muttering.*] A crownéd baggage.

Enter MARIAMNE and her two sons.

Mar. Let us sit here, sweet boys.—Madam, good-morrow.
 Fair greeting to thee, friend.—Come, Alexander,
 Bring me thy bow, I'll string it.

Sal. Pray you, madam,
 Whence came that bow ?

Mar. It was my husband's, madam,
 When that he was a lad.

Sal. He will ill take it
 That thou hast fingered o'er his trappings thus.

Mar. Ah ! dost thou think so ?—Not so hard, my boy ;
 Set thy knee to it steadily. Now, now,
 There goes the string ! Now see if thou canst bend it.

Alex. Almost. 'Tis stiff. Whew ! but it stung my wrist !
 There. Is that better ?

Jos. Good, good, good, my lad !
 Thy father will be boy again to watch thee:
 Well done ! Well done !

Alex. What sayest thou, mother ?

Mar. Why,
 Well done, indeed, my warrior.

Sal. Have care ;
 I know thy father's humor, boy. Beware
 Lest thy fine weapon turn into a rod
 For thy chastisement.

Alex. Madam, dost thou think
 A son of Herod would be beaten ?

Sal. Ay,
 If Herod snuffed occasion. Ay, young sir,
 I do, most surely.

Mar. Then thou art mistaken.

He is not only Herod's son, but mine.

Think you I'd see him beaten?

Sal.

What wouldst do?

Close thine eyes, girl?

Mar.

No, but have closed in death

The eyes of any who did try it.

Sal.

Ay,

Were it the king himself. I can believe thee.

Mar. Thou talkest idly, madam, and beyond
Thy mark o' freedom.—Come here, pretty one.

[*To* ARISTOBULUS.]

Wouldst thou shoot, too?

Aris.

Ay, mother, that I would.

But that's too big for me.

Mar.

I'll have one cut, then,

Fit for thy dainty grasp. How's that, my heart?

Aris. Oh, well, well, well! I will shoot too. Oh, ay!
Brother! oh, brother, look, I'm going to shoot,
Better than thee! I'm going to kill a tiger
And sleep upon his hide. And then another;
That shall be mother's. Then another yet
For Uncle Joseph. Uncle, wouldst thou like it?
Thou wilt not mind the hole my arrow makes,
Wilt thou? Look, uncle, big as this. Look, mother,
As big as this!

Mar.

Sweet chatterer, come here.

Thou'rt treading on thy aunt Salome's robe.

Sal. What's that? Let him tread on. His mother, truth,
Sets foot upon my neck: then why not he
Upon my garments? Go on, boy, go on.

Alex. Why, what's the matter, aunt? What has he done?

Sal. What is the matter? Out, thou babbling brat!
I'll answer thee. [*Cuff's him.*]

Mar. [*Seizing her wrist and swinging her to her knees by a sudden movement.*]

Ask thou his pardon, there.

Do as I bid thee. It were best for thee.

Look in my eyes, and thou wilt know 'twere best
For thee and thine that thou obeyed'st me! Quick,
His pardon.

Sal. [*As if cowed.*] Well, I ask it, then.

Mar.

More, more.

Say, "Alexander, son of Mariamne,
I crave thy pardon with all humbleness."
Say it!

Sal.

I say it.

Mar.

Woman, speak those words!

Speak!

Sal. Alexander, son of Mariamne,
I crave thy pardon.

Mar. With all humbleness.

Sal. Well, with all humbleness.

Mar. Now crave thou mine.

Jos. Nay, madam.

Mar. Crave thou mine !

Sal. [*Sneeringly.*] Ay, Joseph, plead !

Mar. Crave thou my pardon, woman !

Sal. Well, I crave it. [*Rising to her feet.*]

But better for thee hadst thou cursed high heaven

Than dared Salome's vengeance !

[*Exit.*]

Jos. Good madam, if it had been possible,

I would thou hadst left this undone.

Mar. Good uncle,

In that she is thy wife, with all my heart

I wish so too. But it was written so.

Think on't no more. Thou hast my trust and love

In everything save in thy spouse, good uncle.

I cannot feign. Therein is my chief fault—

Or virtue, as you will.—Look, little one,

Go with thine uncle : he will see thy bow

Doth suit thee.

Aris. Wilt thou truly, uncle dear ?

Jos. Ay, that I will. Come on.—Sweet niece, I thank thee.

[*Exit ARISTOBULUS and JOSEPH.*]

Alex. Mother, I loved thee when thou flungest her down !

How strong thou art ! Oh, thou art very queen

Without thy diadem, as night is night

Without the stars. Sweet mother !

Mar. Ah, my boy,

Thou dost not know——

Alex. What, mother ?

Mar. [*Absently.*] What it is

To be a Herod's wife.

Alex. How dost thou mean ?

Mar. [*As if to herself.*]

Doubted at every turn,—insulted, braved

By those who most should cherish me,—my children

Subject to slights which I could better bear,

My mother scorned, her father set at naught,

And I not even queen over his moods.

Alex. What art thou saying, mother ? Please remember

That which thou saidst thou'dst tell me.

Mar. What, dear ?

Alex. Why,

How thou first saw'st my father ! How he threw

The javelin ! how rode the Arab horse !

Oh, thou dost know. Wilt thou not tell me now ?

Mar. How I first saw thy father ?

Alex. Ay. Please do it.

Mar. It is so long ago.

Alex. Oh, mother, please !
Don't say thou hast forgotten it, sweet mother !
Think !

Mar. God in heaven ! it is the one last thing
That I would do. Nay, never heed me, child ;
I do remember what thou'dst have. So, then,
Sit there. How like, how like thine eyes are, sweet,
Unto thy father's ! Well, I'll on. Let's see :
How was it, now ? His very trick o' lip.
Well, well, I'll tell thee. 'Twas a summer day,
And I a maid of Spring. Canst thou think, boy,
Of me as being some sweet little maid
Such as thou'lt some day woo and marry ?

Alex. Nay,
I will not wed her unless she be in truth
Thy very copy as thou art this instant.

Mar. Oh, darling ! thy old mother ?

Alex. Old ! Thou old ?
But tell the story, for thou shalt not tease me.

Mar. 'Twas Nisan, then, a day o' cloud and shine,
Yet all the clouds condensed would scarce have dyed
One o' thy swarthy locks. There was a festival,
And there were promised many feats of strength
And skill in various ways, especially
Casting the javelin. Thou knowest, sweet,
Samaria was my home, the lovely "vale
Of many waters,"—so they call it. Oh
To see the great pomegranate-trees in bloom
Once more—but once ! It was in very truth
As though the heart's blood of the year had stained them.
I'm coming to thy father ! I was then
Affianced to him only, ne'er had seen
Even his pictured face, and greatly feared
To think of how he might appear. At last,
When almost we were tired o' watching youths
Draw bows or brandish spears, he came. His horse,
A coal-black Arab, trapped in beaten gold,
As though dark Night had borrowed of bright Day,
Chafed at the reins and reared. At that the king,
Herod, thy father, dashed his mighty fist
Against the brute's strained crest, then, loosing rein,
Poised lithely, with his javelin aloft,
Keen on the changing air. Onward they swooped,
Straight on, with singing hair and hoofs a-thunder,
Like to a wind made visible.

Alex. On, mother !
Tell me the rest ! Please, mother ! mother ! mother !
Don't stop to think of it ! Tell me the rest !

Mar. He cast the javelin. The severed air
Shrieked with its wound, and, lo ! the last shot arrow

That marked the target quivered, cleft in twain
By that sure-hurléd blade.

Alex. He cleft the arrow?—
The shaft itself? Oh, mother, dost thou think
I could so cast a javelin some day?
Not now, but when I'm bigger? Dost thou think it?

Mar. I know not if thou couldst excel withal
To such extent as did thy father, dear:
He is world-honored for such feats. But, truth,
I think thou couldst in part approach his skill.
Thou hast his very swing o' carriage.

Alex. Well,
What next? What did he then?

Mar. Leaped from his horse
And caught me in his arms.

Enter HEROD.

Her. As he doth now!
What! trembling? Oh, my queen! my wife! my life!
Tremble no more! Give me thy lips! Look up!
Nay, sweet, look down. [*Kneeling.*] Here is my rightful place;
Here let me kneel forever!

Mar. Nay, my lord,
Thy place is something higher, for 'tis here.
[*Touching her heart.*]

Her. Then lift me to it, for I dare not rise
Of my sole self unto such happiness.

Mar. [*Lifting him.*] Come, then.

Her. Oh, God! to love like this is pain.
Give me thy shoulder for a moment, sweet.
All of me that's not Herod is in mine eyes.

Mar. And all that's Herod or not Herod, love,
Is in my heart.

Her. [*Taking her face into his hands.*] In nothing changed:
the same

Deep, maddening eyes; lips curled for love; rich locks
That tempt the fingers. Ay, the same, the same,
Even to that flutter in thy throat when touched,
As though thy heart were some wild, wingéd thing
That struggled to be free. Wild heart, I'll kiss thee
For being wild. [*Kisses her throat.*]

Mar. Ah, Herod! ah, thy corselet!—
It cuts my arm.

Her. Let my lips plead its pardon.
[*Kissing her shoulder.*] God's heart, girl, thou art twenty times
more sweet

Than all thy dear Samaria's sun-kissed fruits.
Thy lips! Once more thy lips!—thy lips!—thy lips!

Mar. Nay, Herod! Herod! thou forgett'st the boy.
This is not seemly.

Her. Ho ! Not seemly, say'st thou ?
Herod and seemly harnessed, were as well
As were a tiger lashed unto a dove.

Mar. Yet doves, the Greeks do tell us, draw Love's chariot.

Her. The chariot of Love's queen. The king of love
Guides heel-winged tigers with a sword of flame.
Talk not to me of doves : it is as though
One little, milk-white cloud did near the blaze
Of some red sunset. Heaven is in my heart
Because of thee,—but heaven on fire. Look, boy ;
Come to my knee. Thou art a well-knit lad :
Wouldst learn to cast the javelin ?

Alex. Oh, father !

Her. That's well,—that's well. Ay, call me father, boy :
I like it better than more stately terms
From thy young lips.—He hath thy brows, my queen.

Mar. Nay, thine—unto a hair.

Her. Why, heart, look here :
For th' dark original of this proud arch
I first did love thee. Mine ? Thou knowest well
Those were ne'er copied from my shaggy front.—
Look thou, to-morrow ere the sun be high
I'll teach thee how to cast a javelin.

Alex. Sire !

Her. Nay, father, or no javelin.

Alex. Dear father !

Her. Thou rogue ! that knack o' sweetness, without ques-
tion,
Was from thy mother gotten. Well, come kiss me.
Now off.

Alex. Ay, father. Mother dear, farewell ! [Exit.]

Her. Now to my lips !

Mar. My lord.

Her. Nay, do not speak.

Mar. I cannot breathe.

Her. Ah, peace !

Mar. Nay, let me breathe.

Her. Presently, by and by. Why, struggle not.
I would not hurt thee.

Mar. But thou dost,—thou dost.
Thou art so strong thou dost not know.

Her. Well, there.

Come lean against me. Look ! what thinkest thou
That I have here ? [Touching his breast.]

Mar. I cannot think.

Her. But try,

To please me. Come.

Mar. A lock of hair ?

Her. Ay, that,
Since first I loved thee ; but there's something else.

Mar. Indeed I cannot think what 'tis.

Her. [*Taking out picture.*] Why, here,—
What dost thou think o' this?

Mar. Why, 'tis myself!
When didst thou have it done? And where? By whom?
Am I as fair as that?

Her. Is moonlight fair
As starlight?

Mar. Nay, my eyes are not so large.

Her. Larger.

Mar. Oh, Herod, no! And see what lips!

Her. I'd rather feel them. Nay, shrink not, shrink not:
Thou dost not know how 't chafes me when thou shrinkest.

Mar. I will not, then. Who painted it?

Her. A Greek
Named Procrius. Here, take it in thy hands.

'Tis well done, is it not? [*Aside.*] She is as true
To me as I was false to her. I'd swear
By every goddess in the Roman heaven
That she ne'er eyed that picture in her life.
Ay, 'twas all Alexandra. God of Israel!
Would to Thy mercy that, like Adam's wife,
All others could be mothered by a rib!

Mar. [*Coming towards him.*] It is most wondrous.
In truth, my love, it gladdens me at heart
That thou'st so good a copy of myself,
To help remembrance when thou'rt absent.

Her. Nay,
Memory needs no aid from Mariamne.
But how thinkest thou I got this picture?

Mar. Truth,
It is beyond me.

Her. Whose dost think it was
Ere it was mine?

Mar. I cannot dream.

Her. Why, then—
Mark Antony's.

Mar. Mark Antony's! Thou jestest.

Her. I do not jest. Thy mother sent this picture
Unto Mark Antony.

Mar. No! no! Why should she?

Her. I know not; but for no good,—that I know.

Mar. What wilt thou do?

Her. Thou knowest as well as I
That for offence so grave imprisonment
Were a light punishment.

Mar. Ah, for my sake
Forgive her. Thou dost know how rash she is,—
How hot o' temper. 'Twas a crime, indeed,
To bare my face unto the Roman's eyes;

But I, who bare my very soul to thee,
Do crave her pardon. Look, my lord, I kneel.

Her. No, by my soul ! thou never shalt bend knee
To any save thy God. She was forgiven
At thy first asking.

Mar. Now thou'rt king indeed,—
Now Herod at his best.

Her. Come, prove it, then,
Upon my lips.—Who comes ?

Enter JOSEPH and ARISTOBULUS.

Aris. [*Brandishing a little bow and arrow.*] Oh, mother,
look ! look ! look ! [*Seeing the king.*] Oh, uncle !

Her. Soft !

Come here, boy. Why, thou art most bravely weaponed.
Canst bend that monstrous bow ?—Good uncle, greeting.

Jos. I knew not thou wert back, my lord, indeed.
When didst thou come ?

Her. Why, some few moments gone.
Uncle, I would have word with thee.—My love,
Farewell until this interview be o'er.
Wait for me in our chamber.

Mar. Ay, my lord.
Come, little archer. [*Exit with ARISTOBULUS.*]

Her. Good uncle, thou wert right in all thou saidst :
The mother of my queen, and not herself,
Did send her picture to Mark Antony.

Jos. Praise be to God for this ! And, good my lord,
Let it be long ere thou again dost doubt her.

Her. Is never long enough ?

Jos. Ay, if thou'rt serious.
But close thine ears against the slanders, sire,
My wife and thine own mother are most sure
Again to bring thee.

Her. Death's not deafer, sir,
Than I will be.

Jos. Nor let looks stir thee.

Her. None,
As I am king.

Jos. As thou art man !

Her. Ay, then,
As I am man. Not one, not one. Rest, uncle ;
I will be staunch. But look you, sir : what object
Dost think Hyrcanus' daughter had in this ?

Jos. Nay, I know not. Some woman's muddle, surely.
Thou'lt not stir up dissension when 'tis napping,
For such small cause ?

Her. Small cause, say you ? Small cause !
Just heaven ! it hath never seemed so great
As by this "small" o' thine. Small cause, that she,

My queen, hath been unveiled unto the eyes
That are a wanton's daily mirrors ! Oh,
Small cause had God to punish Lucifer,
If that my cause against this shrew be small !

Jos. What wilt thou, then ?

Her. I would have 'prisoned her,
But that my queen did plead against it, sir.—
Unto less heart-near matters : Antony
Has given Cœlosyria to his jade.

Jos. That's better for Judea than for Antony.
Sawest Cleopatra while in Laodicea ?

Her. Ay. How she hates me !

Jos. Thou wert safer, nephew,
In Cleopatra's hate than in her love.

Her. Ay, but she works against me.

Enter CYPROS.

Greeting, mother.

How dost thou ?

Cyp. Well in body, but in mind
Something less easy. Sir, I crave your leave.
[*Aside.*] Bid him go forth. I have some news for thee.

Her. Is it so musty now it will not keep ?

Cyp. It doth concern Hyrcanus' daughter, Herod.
If thou'st no care to hear it, I will go.

Her. Nay, stay. Of Alexandra ? I will hear it.—
Uncle, thy leave.

Jos. Nephew, thy promise.

Her. Ay,
I will remember.

Jos. Heaven aid thee, then ! [Exit.]

Her. Mother, thou art not in my love just now.
How camest thou to state so falsely, madam,
This matter of the picture ?

Cyp. Good my son,
How dost thou mean ?

Her. Thou knewest all the while
Hyrcanus' daughter sent it,—not my wife.

Cyp. Nay, Herod, as I live. But how dost know
'Twas only Alexandra ?

Her. That's no matter.
Suffice it that I know. What's this thou saidst
Thou hadst to tell me ?

Cyp. While that thou wast gone,
Reports did reach us thou wert slain by Antony ;
Whereon this woman strove to coax thy uncle
That he would set forth straightway from Judea
And seek protection with the Roman legion.

Her. She did ?

Cyp. Ay, by my soul !

Her. Thou hast once lied :
How shall I know if once thou speakest truth ?

Cyp. Here comes Salome : ask her.

Her. Hath Salome
The writ of truth about her ? [*Enter SALOME.*]

Look you, sister,

What of this flying to the Roman ensigns ?

Sal. True.

Her. Wilt thou swear it ?

Sal.

Ay.

Her.

God knows ye women

Would swear hell heaven, to win the devil over.

How shall I know ?

Cyp.

Ask Joseph.

Sal.

Nay, not Joseph.

Her. Why not ?

Sal.

Because he would swear wet were dry,

To win one smile from thy chaste queen.

Her.

What meanest thou ?

Sal. But what I said.

Her.

Why saidst thou “my chaste queen” ?

Sal. Is she not chaste ?

Her.

Softly ! No insolence !

Why should I not ask Joseph ?

Sal.

Ask him, then :

’Tis naught to me.

Her.

But ’tis not naught to me !

Woman, give word. Why dost thou simper ? Speak !

What dost thou smirk at ?

Sal.

Why, at mine own thoughts.

Her. Are they so merry ?—Mother, dost thou know

Why thus she Josephs me ?

Cyp.

’Tis not unnatural

A wife should feel some jealousy when——

Her.

Ay,

When what ? This ‘what’s’ the thing. Sister, have care,—

Have care : I am more Mariamne’s husband

Than I’m thy brother.

Sal.

Think’st thou that is news ?

Her. Then answer.

Sal.

I have answered.

Her.

Trifle not.

What dost thou hint at ?

Sal.

Hinting’s not my way.

Thank God, I have the courage to be honest.

Her. Then demonstrate it. What didst mean just now,
By saying that Joseph would swear wet were dry,
To win a smile from Mariamne ?

Sal.

Why,

That he would do it. There’s no mystery there.

Her. Pernicious vixen ! I'd not husband thee
Though on our wedding-day I were to pose
God of the hundredth heaven ! What dost thou mean,
Thou smirking obstinacy ? Speak, I say !
If that thou dost not word it o' th' instant,
I'll give thy vaunted courage work to do.

Sal. If thou wouldst hear thy shame told as a tale,
Pardon me if I would not so hear mine.

Her. My shame and thine ? My shame ? Have care ! have care !

Herod is Herod, though ten times a brother.
My shame ? My shame ? My shame ? Ay, let thy blood
Forswear thy poisonous lips, as that of thee
In my hot veins forswears thy poisonous self.
Mother, begone ! we'll have this out alone.
No word ! Depart ! [*Exit CYPROS.*]

Now, woman.

Sal.
'Tis not my fault.

Why dost glare ?

Her. Fault ? Fault ? Who spoke of fault ?
Just now 'twas shame. Well, shame's a fault, that's true.
And faults are shameful when found out. Come, hasten,
Madam, this matter.

Sal. [*Pulling out a bracelet.*] Hast thou e'er seen this ?

Her. Ah, 'tis the bracelet I gave Mariamne
At our betrothal. Jade, how didst thou get it ?
She wears it ever on her left arm.

Sal. Nay,
Did wear,—not wears it.

Her. Girl, where didst thou find it ?

Sal. In Joseph's closet.

Her. May that lie thrice damn thee !
What ! thou wouldst have me think—oh, devilish harpy !—
Have I e'er called thee sister ? Look, Salome,
If thou hast jested, I'll forgive thee.

Sal. Nay,
If I had jested, I would not forgive
Myself.

Her. Oh, devil !—devil !

Sal. Why, just powers !
Let me begone ere that I am quite murdered
For doing what's my duty.

Her. Move no step
Until I wring that poisonous mind o' thine
Of its last drop. Thou say'st thou found'st this bracelet
Within thy husband's closet ?

Sal. Ay.

Her. Then thou
Didst steal and put it there !

Sal. Brother !

Her. I say,
If thou didst find the bracelet of my wife
In Joseph's closet, thou didst steal it thence
And put it there for reasons of thine own!

Sal. Herod!

Her. Ay, that's the name of Jewry's king.
Doth any dare to brave him who doth bear it?
Look you, if this be false,—nay, it is false,—
Why, mark you, then, if when I show this bracelet
Unto my queen, with word of thy foul slander,—
If, when I tell her this, she pleads not for thee,
To have thee pardoned, dear as is this toy
For all the memories that it doth enring,
I'll have it beaten to an arrow-head,
And send it through thy false and shrivelled heart
With mine own hand!

[*Exit.*

Sal. Accurséd be ye both!

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*A room in HEROD'S palace.*

Enter MARIAMNE and ALEXANDRA.

Mar. Mother, I do but ask thee be advised.

Alex. Thou dost but ask me be advised? Indeed!
So thou dost only ask me be advised?
Well, am I not a docile, patient mother?—
A gentle, good, obedient, humble queen?
Thou ask'st me be advised! Now, let a babe
Advise its mother how to suckle it,—
The stars grow independent, and turn back
Upon their courses to instruct high God
How they should move,—earth rail at heaven's method,—
The entire and changeless system change about,
Until at last the nations rule their kings,
Not kings their nations! Thou advise me!

Mar. Madam,
Thou must acknowledge that it was not seemly
To send my picture to the Roman general.
What purpose hadst thou?

Alex. What is that to thee,
Since 'twas unseemly? Thou wouldst not seek, surely,
To learn unseemly matters?

Mar. Good my mother,
Wilt thou not see that all my care in this
Hath been to place thee beyond scorn or danger?
Thou ran'st a risk almost as terrible
As when thou soughtest to convey thyself

And Aristobulus to Cleopatra
Concealed in perforated coffins.

Alex.

Risk !

What risk ? Of what ?

Mar.

Of being imprisoned.

Alex.

I ?—

I be imprisoned ?—I ?—Hyrcanus' daughter ?—

The sometime queen of this usurping king ?

Mar. Mother, have care.

Alex.

He to imprison me ?

He—Herod—to imprison Alexandra ?

Out ! I will not believe it.

Mar.

Best thou didst.

Alex. What ! thou wouldst suffer it ?

Mar.

To be a queen

Doth mean to suffer many things, good mother ;

And who should know this better than thyself ?

Alex. Ay, who indeed, O God !

Mar.

Then for my sake

Be warned in time. For there may come an hour

When even Mariamne 'll plead in vain.

Alex. What wouldst thou ?

Mar.

Be but careful. Make no plans

To follow secret ways. Thou knowest well

Thou'rt watched at every turn.

Alex.

Ay, well I know it.

But what's more exquisite than by thy skill

To make the watcher watch in vain,—outwit him,—

Baffle him utterly ?

Mar.

But recollect

How thou hast ever failed unto this moment.

Alex. We must thrice fail to be successful once.

I have once more to fail.

Mar.

Believe me, mother,

That "once" might never live to breed success.

Here comes the king. I'll ask thee now to go :

'Twere best he did not now see us together.

Alex. I'll think of what thou'st said, but will not promise.

No promises.

[*Exit.*

Mar.

She is my body's mother,

And yet she seems as daughter to my soul.

Oh, would to God that she would be advised !

There's something ominous to me of late

In very silence, and my urgent heart

Cries, "Herod ! Herod ! Herod !" till the night

Is vibrant with his name. Would unto God

I knew to what extent he loveth me,

Or could but sift his passion through his love

And note how much the one outweighs the other !

Joseph doth hold unto the theory

That he doth cherish me above ambition ;
 And yet I doubt :—men so oft love the pleasure
 Above the pleasure-giver. Love lives on trifles,
 And we can lose him wholly with an eye,
 A broken tooth, an arm, our tresses' gold.
 How if some day this face which now he worships
 Were by some grievous accident scarred o'er,
 Made hideous ? How if mine eyes were blurred
 By some fierce, sudden blight ?—my figure mangled ?
 How if—oh, God !—I were a leper ? Then—
 Would he then love me ? Nay, a leprous soul
 Were easier borne of men than that one lock

Enter HEROD.

Should lose its beauty ! Yet, withal, how Joseph
 Doth dwell upon his constancy ! Good Joseph !
 His wife's the only evil thing about him.
 Good, faithful Joseph !

Her. Madam, I am come.

Is Joseph here ?

Mar. No. Dost thou wish for him ?

I'll have him called.

Her. Nay, but I heard his name ;

I'm sure I heard his name.

Mar. Why, so thou didst :

I spoke of him.

Her. Spoke of him ? What of him ?

Do thy thoughts oft run Joseph-wards ?

Mar. Indeed they do, my lord.

Her. Ha !

Mar. I am certain, sir,

He is the faithfulest of those about thee.

Her. The faithfulest ?

Mar. Ay. Why dost thou so stare ?

Her. Know'st thou this bracelet ?

Mar. Oh ! where didst thou find it ?

Thank God 'tis found ! How strange that thou shouldst find it !

Her. Strange ?

Mar. Ay. What then ?

Her. Wherefore is it so strange

That I should find thy bracelet ?

Mar. 'Twas my thought,—

My woman's way o' conjuring coincidence
 Out of a leaf-fall. I did say 'twas strange
 Because it is the bracelet thou didst give me
 At our betrothal. Aristobulus

Did slip it from mine arm this very morn
 While playing, and I have not seen it since,
 Though every servant hath been erranded
 Throughout the palace to make search for it.

Her. Where is the boy?

Mar. With Joseph.

Her. Is there none

Save Joseph to amuse him?

Mar. Nay, thine uncle

Doth love our boys.

Her. And our boys' mother,—yes.

Mar. I think he doth. He is the only one

Of all thy household who is civil to me.

Her. Insinuations?

Mar. Dost insinuate

That I insinuate?

Her. Why not? thou art—

A woman.

Mar. And a queen.

Her. By heaven, thou lookest it!

See that thou act it, too. Have the boy called.

Mar. Who?—Aristobulus?

Her. Ay.

Mar. Wherefore, sir?

Her. Have the boy called, I say.

Mar. I pray you, Herod,

If that he hath offended,—if (more like)

Thy sister and thy mother have borne tales

Concerning him——

Her. Away!

Mar. If thou'st been urged

To harshly deal with him, do not, I pray thee.

Her. Peace!

Mar. He's so young, so frail, so timorous,
So fearful of thee.

Her. It were well his mother

Took lesson by that last. Call him, I say.

Mar. And I, that I will not, unless thyself

Dost tell me why thou wishest him.

Her. Thou wilt not?

—Without, there! [*Enter Servant.*]

Tell the young prince Aristobulus
To wait on me immediately. Hasten!

Mar. If 'tis thy purpose to ungently use him,
Myself shall stand between ye!

Enter ARISTOBULUS.

Come, my heart;

None shall entreat thee.

Aris. Is he angry with me?

Mar. I know not; but he shall not hurt thee.

Her. Boy,

When didst thou have this bracelet?

Mar. Ah!

- Aris.* This morning.—
Oh, mother, who did find it? I'm so glad!
Did the king find it, mother?
- Mar.* I know not.
Her. Where didst thou have it last?
- Aris.* I don't remember.
Her. Thou dost not?
- Aris.* No. I think——
Her. Well, out with it!
- What dost thou think?
- Aris.* I think my uncle Joseph
Took us into his chamber, and I think——
I think—I think——
- Her.* Gods! what dost stammer at?
I will not eat thee.
- Mar.* Thou dost eye him so.
Her. What, then! shall I not look at mine own son?
What is it that thou thinkest, boy?
- Aris.* 'Twas there
I dropped it.
- Her.* Come to me.
Aris. Oh, mother!
- Her.* Come.
Mar. Nay, go, my boy.—If thou dost hurt him, Herod,
From that same moment I'm no more thy wife!
- Her.* So be it, then.—Come to me, boy. Now up,—
Up for a kiss. Here, take this chain with thee:
'Twill make as bright a plaything as the bracelet.
Now, dost thou love me?
- Aris.* I—I—think so. Oh!
I mean, I do. Don't hurt me. Put me down.
- Her.* Go, then.
Aris. May I go, mother?
- Mar.* Ay.
Exit ARISTOBULUS.
- Her.* My queen,
Come, let me new-betroth thee.
- Mar.* First, my lord,
Tell me the meaning of this most strange scene
Through which we have just gone.
- Her.* For what wouldst know?
Mar. For that I am thy wife and Jewry's queen.
Thinkest thou, my lord, that thou canst doubt me—ay,
In any way—and that I'll meekly bear it?
I tell thee thou hadst better doubt thyself
Ten thousand times than Mariamne once!
- Her.* I do not doubt thee.
Mar. Thou hast doubted me;
And once to doubt is ever to be doubtful.
Thinkest thou I did not mark the hidden meaning

With which thou didst enweigh the boy's least word,—
 How thou didst question and cross-question him,
 Frighten, soothe, frown, and smile all in an instant?
 Why didst thou summon him—my child, my last-born—
 To answer what his mother had replied to?
 Ay, wherefore didst thou that? And as thou entered'st,
 Why didst thou eye me when I spoke of Joseph?
 There's more in all of this than Joseph only.
 Can it be Joseph's wife?

Her. How if it were?

Mar. Then farewell happiness, farewell peace, hope,
 Life, joy, content,—ay, Herod, fare thee well!

Her. How dost thou mean?

Mar. If Herod once hath listened
 Unto Salome, Death may wed with Life
 Ere Mariamne be again a queen!

Her. Why, what dost mean?

Mar. That thy trust was my throne,
 Thy love my sceptre, and thy faith my crown.
 Shall I be queen and yet despoiled of these?—
 A beggar of small favors in the kingdom
 Where I was wont to reign? Not I!—O God!
 I'd rather be Thy humblest slave, than queen
 Unto a king whom a Salome rules!

Her. Nay, Mariamne.

Mar. Am I Mariamne,
 And yet my child made witness 'gainst me? Mariamne,
 And yet Salome heard before me? Mariamne,
 And yet by Herod doubted?

Her. By my kingdom,
 I do not doubt thee.

Mar. Then why brought'st my child
 To prove me? Yea, if that the flesh were false
 From whence he sprung, why should he be more true?
 How didst thou know 'twere not a lesson taught,
 That guiltiness might look like innocence?
 Who is there in the breadth of Israel
 To prove that Mariamne is not false?

Her. Himself! He who could meet thine eyes and doubt thee
 Would prove himself the very core of falseness!

Mar. He who Salome trusts doubts Mariamne.
 Thou canst not both believe in Jove and Jah:
 Honor to one doth mean to one dishonor,—
 For one a throne, for one a sepulchre.

Her. Madam, I swear to thee.

Mar. Swear unto God:
 His throne is sure.

Her. No surer than thine own.

Mar. Then heaven's kingdom rocks.

Her. Nay, be assured.

Mar. Of what? Of my abasement? Would to God I were as sure of ultimate content!

Her. Nay, Mariamne, hear me. Let me speak. I never was suspicious without cause.

Mar. And such a cause!

Her. Why, there was reason in't.

Mar. One grain of reason leavens a huge mass Of inconsistency. Of what, my lord, Am I suspected?

Her. I was told to-day This bracelet had been found in Joseph's closet.

Mar. What if it had? What then? In Joseph's closet? What if it had been found in Joseph's closet?

Her. Why, sure thou seest where conclusion points?

Mar. He points into a blackness where mine eyes Are sensible of naught but blackness.

Her. Why, Thou knowest how mine uncle worships thee, Is ever ready to defend or serve thee, Doth in the least thing find thee love-worthy.

Mar. And so he doth. What then? What hath my bracelet To do with this?

Her. Why, 'tis self-evident. Thou hast ne'er parted from it till to-day,— Not once since I first clasped it on thee. Well, Then, when I hear—dost mark me?—when I hear It has been found in Joseph's closet,—ay, When I hear where 'twas found, was it but natural That I should think—should find it strange—should wonder—— Oh, thou must understand what I would say. It is all past: let us not think on it,— Let us not think.

Mar. I will be queen to Death When I have ceased to think upon it. What! Thou didst suspect me with thine uncle? Me? Thy queen, thy wife, the mother of thy sons? Thou hast suspected me, and with thine uncle? —Now, God in heaven, commemorate this day By pardoning Satan, for Thou mayest withal Unjustly have condemned him!

Her. Hear me, madam.

Mar. Hear thee, to have mine ears more blasted? Nay, Let deafness rescue me from further words That thou mayst utter!

Her. Madam.

Mar. Out! Away! I will not hear thee! False with Joseph? False?— False with his treasurer? Nay, God, with any? Why, I must laugh at this! The world must laugh!

Oh, God ! Oh, God ! I am indeed unqueened !
My heart and sceptre both at once are broken !

Her. Weep not.

Mar. I do not weep ! Tears, such as women
Do shed for lesser causes, I would scorn
To offer this my sorrow. The red drops
Shed from my riven heart, no man may witness,
Though he were ten times tyrant, ten times king,
Ten times a Herod !

Her. Mariamne.

Mar. Ay,
Murder my name, now thou hast slain my honor !
Cry, "Mariamne," till the west doth ring
An echo to the east, north unto south,
The earth to heaven, until the very stars
Cease in their song, to shriek, "Adulteress !"

Her. Why, thou art mad !

Mar. Oh, would to God I were !—
That this my reason had not joy survived,
To view my misery as a thing apart !
—O God ! Shame is chief torturer in hell :
Kill me outright, and be more merciful
Than hadst Thou spared more lives than I have griefs !

Her. Wilt thou not listen ?

Mar. Shall I tutor God ?
Since He is deaf to me, I unto thee
Will be deaf also !

Her. Mariamne, stay.

Mar. She was the queen of Jewry, and was slain
By one of Herod's words. I am the queen
Of my sole self ; therefore I will begone.

[*Exit.*]

Her. How she defies me ! Yet I swear I love her
The more for her defiance. She were one
To sit beside Jah on His throne and nod
At quits with Juno. She hath scourged me bravely,
Yet from each wound my heart's blood leaped with love,
To kiss the hand that smote. And she was proud,
Held herself loftily, and veiled her eyes
Beneath her haughty lids, as who should say,
"Thine halves can view sufficiently this Herod."
Israel's God ! her mind is virgin yet :
I've never wedded save her body. She
To word me thus,—she,—Mariamne,—she,—
The conquered daughter of a conquered king ?
And yet I love her for 't. Yea, were I God,
And able to fill space with Mariamne,
Compact the stars into her diadem,
Darken heaven to give her light, and of eternity
Make one embrace, I were an-hungred still !

[*Enter Servant.*]

Serv. A messenger, my lord, from Antony.

Her. From Antony? Command him hither. [*Exit Servant.*
So!

Shall public warfare chafe the ill-shod heel
Of private strife? Can I not rest a moment?—

[*Enter Messenger.*

Papers from Antony? What can they treat of? [*Opens them.*]

What's this? What's this, I say? Knew'st thou of this?

Lysanius of Syria put to death!

Leagued with the Parthians! His rule given o'er—

Given to the Queen of Egypt,—Cleopatra!

Know you the contents of these papers, sir?

Mess. In part, my lord.

Her. All this since I have left!

And is Lysanius dead?

Mess. Even so, my liege.

Her. Lysanius dead, and Cleopatra queen

Of his domain? God! let me on—on—on!

What! More donations? The Nabalacan kingdom,—

The sea-coast—what! Palestine's sea-coast—all—

From Eleutherus even unto Egypt,

With only Tyre and Sidon, sir, excepted?

This greedy wanton would storm heaven itself

Were Babel's tower standing! What! More yet?

Jericho, too?—Without, there, ho! [*Enter Attendant.*

Thou, sir,

Bid Sohemus and Saramallas hither—

Stay, let them wait within my audience-chamber.

[*Exit Attendant.*

While I fold these, sir, know'st thou if the queen

Went into Syria with Antony?

Mess. She did, my lord.

Her. Ah! Say you? There's the germ

Whence sprung this crooked tree o' knowledge. Come.

Let's to my audience-chamber. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.—*Enter ALEXANDRA and HYRCANUS.*

Alex. But why not write to Malchus? Is not Malchus
Thy friend? Hath he not proved himself thy friend?

Now, as Arabia's governor and lord,

Is he not placed to take the part of friend

In verity towards us? Thou must know it!—

Ask that he send some horsemen to escort us

In safety from Jerusalem's boundaries.

What's in a letter? Thou couldst find some ten,

Ay, twelve, to bear 't in secret. There's Dositheus!

I'm sure Dositheus loves thee.

Hyr. So he doth;

Ay, so he doth,—he doth,—I'm sure he doth.

But as for writing unto Malchus,—why,
It is too much to ask of friendship.

Alex.

What?

What is too much? That he do send us horsemen
To aid us in our flight? Call'st thou that much?
Why, 'twere an office he would claim with gladness.
As for the multitude, thou knowest well
They are with thee,—not Herod.

Hyr.

Daughter, daughter,

Why wilt thou not let peace sleep peacefully?
Quiet doth seem to me a boon, good daughter,
That kings might place before their diadems.
I am too old to plan new orders.

Alex.

So?

Then let me do 't. The future race of kings
That yet may spring to power from Mariamne
Will never find that fault, believe me, father,
Among the virtues of their sovereignty.
Come, here is pen; come, here is parchment. Write,—
Write,—write.

Hyr.

To Malchus? That he send us horsemen?

Alex. Ay, escort to the lake Asphaltites.

Write, sire, as thou wast king and wilt be! Write.

Hyr. Soft, daughter, soft! How would it be if Herod
Should by some means discover I had written?
Would it not anger him? Hast pondered that?

Alex. Oh, wilt thou pause to think of Herod's anger,
When thine should make thee pitiless? Plunge thy pen
Into my veins, that my resolvéd blood
May of itself form the important words
And save thy dubious hand the trouble!

Hyr.

Nay,

Nay, nay; be not so violent, good daughter.
Canst thou not give me time to ponder this?
If Herod finds thou hadst a part in it,
How then? How then?

Alex.

Let then take care of then.

This now is in our charge. Oh, father, write.
Think on thy murdered grandson,—think on him,
The boy thou loved'st, so fair, so pure, so holy,
So all that Herod is not! Think on him,
And on his fate, on what our fates may be,
And write to Malchus. See, here is the parchment
Close to thy hand, and wax made ready. See—
I'll write it for thee,—That he'll send straightway
A troop of horsemen to escort us hence.
That's all. Look! thou hast but to sign thy name
And seal it with thy seal: unto Dositheus
I will myself commit it privately.
As for Dositheus, thou knowest, father,

He could not prove unfaithful. He knows well
 What 'tis to lose kinspeople by this means,—
 This Herod-plague. Ay, ay, Dositheus
 Will be as true to thee as thine own arm.
 Fear not. Wilt thou not sign?

Hyr. How if I sign—
 My death-warrant?

Alex. Think not such woman thoughts :
 They do unsex thee. Naught can come of it
 But good to thee and thine.

Hyr. Sometimes death's good
 When life is evil.

Alex. Oh, delay no longer !
 Sign, as thou lovest me,—as I love thee,—
 As God doth love us both ! Sign,—sign, Hyrcanus.

Hyr. Thou'rt sure thou hast not asked but that?

Alex. But what?

Hyr. That he send horsemen to escort us?

Alex. Ay,

As I'm thy daughter, that is all. Now sign.
 Good father, sweet, sweet father, sign the letter.
 Wilt thou not sign to please me, father? Look !
 I have not had a pleasure since the day
 On which we lost our Aristobulus.
 It will so please me.

Hyr. Well——

Alex. Oh, do it ! do it !

Some one may come. There is no time.

Hyr. Thou'rt sure

Thou'st only asked for escort?

Alex. Sure,—sure,—sure.

Now sign it, father,—dearest father.

Hyr. Well,

If thou art sure thou'st asked no more than that——

Alex. I swear it by my dead boy's murdered body !

Hyr. Soft ! not so shrilly,—not so shrilly, daughter.
 There [*signs letter*], will that pleasure thee?

Alex. Ay, God alone

Doth know how much ! Oh, dear my father, trust me,
 When we are safe beyond these listening walls,
 I'll tell thee how I thank thee ! Some one comes.

Enter MARIAMNE, slowly.

Sweet father, say no word to her as yet :
 She must not know of this till by and by.
 Why, gods ! how pale she is !—Daughter, good-morrow.
 What ails thee?

Mar. Nothing. Mine own spirit. Ah !

How farest thou, dear Hyrcanus ?

Hyr. Why, my sweet one,

As old men fare who have no occupation
Save thinking on what occupied them once.

Mar. 'Tis a sad way to live.

Hyr. Think you?

Mar. Ay, sire;

But to live any way is sad.

Alex. How now?

What sour experience gave that maxim birth?

What hath gone wrong?

Mar. My destiny.

Alex. Why, girl,

I never saw thee in such plight before.

Mar. Nor I myself.

Hyr. Dost thou feel ill, my star?—

But then how rustily old wits do work!

Stars are exempt from maladies and ailments,

As thou shouldst be, my blossom.

Mar. Thou'rt so good,

So gentle ever, I do love thee. Here,

Give me thy hand. Doth not my forehead burn?

Hyr. Ay, ay, it doth.—What's well for fever, daughter?

The child hath fever.

Mar. There's no cure for this.

Alex. Now, by my faith, thou hast a fever, girl!

This comes o' too much roof-walking by night.

Thou knowest I warned thee not to stay so late.

But then I have a drink of balsam-flowers

That savors more of magic and strange arts

Than doth beseem a Jewish beverage.

I'll give thee some to drink.

Mar. 'Twill do no good.

Alex. How dost thou say? I tell thee that it will.

Come, be not obstinate.

Hyr. Ay, go, my lamb,

Go, take thy mother's brew. Go, pretty one:

She makes rare brews. There's one she hath of late,—

'Twill stop an aching back,—'tis wonderful.

Mar. Hast one will stop an aching heart—for aye?

Enter JOSEPH.

Jos. [*To HYR.*] My lord, the king would speak with thee.

Hyr. Well, Joseph—

Be docile, pretty one: thy mother's brews

Are brewed with strange discretion. Best you hearkened.

Wilt hearken, daughter?—Yes, I come, good Joseph.—

Fair health attend thee, fair one. Take the brew. [*Exit.*]

Jos. Sweet niece, how pale thou art!—How is't, in truth?

Is she ill, madam?

Alex. Why, I know not, sir.

Mayhap she'll not acknowledge it. She looks so.

Mar. Nay, I am well enough, good uncle.—Mother, Reach me my needlework.

Alex. What! wilt thou work?
Best that thou took'st the air awhile.

Jos. Ay, madam.
Wilt thou not walk?

Mar. Good uncle, let me rest.

Alex. How? peevish?

Mar. Possibly. Despair, good mother,
Dons strange disguises.—Seemed I peevish, uncle?
I'm sorry for it.

Jos. Tut! tut! tut! 'tis nothing.
I mean, thou wert not peevish.

Mar. Nay, I was.

Alex. Ay, ay, thou wert indeed. What hath gone wrong?
Haply thy Herod hath his favors stinted,—
Doth not so hotly love thee?

Jos. Madam, madam,
The king's love doth not wane with lesser fires,
But, like the sun, burns steadily, always,
Though sometimes by a cloud 'tis darkened.

Alex. Pshaw!
It twinkles like a star; is no more fixed
Than torch-reflections in a restless sea;
Waneth and waxeth ever with the moon;
Needeth, like any lamp, to be refilled
With flattery's oil; flares with the wind o' passion,
Like any earth-born flame.

Jos. Wilt thou, sweet niece,
Hear this of thy fond lord, and yet be silent?

Mar. Whom is he fond of?

Jos. Madam, canst thou ask it?

Mar. Sir, canst thou answer it?

Jos. Ay, that can I.
With all my heart I'll speak in his heart's cause.
If ever man loved woman, Jewry's king
Doth love the queen of Jewry.

Alex. Pah! go to!
Go to, I say! He'd love her ten times better
Were she the queen of somewhere else.

Jos. Nay, lady,
Man were a god could he love more than Herod.

Alex. Ay, ay, ay,—more than Herod loves himself.
I can believe thee.

Jos. [Turning to MARIAMNE.] Madam, sure thou knowest
How dear thy husband holds thee.

Mar. No, good uncle.

Jos. No! Ah, thou meanest thou wouldst make me think
'Tis past thy comprehension.

Alex. Pshaw, I say!

He loves her by the moment, by the mood,—
To fill the gap 'twixt war and war.

Jos. Why, surely
Thou dost not think so, madam? As I live,
There are ten thousand proofs he loves his queen,—
Ay, more, that Herod doth love Mariamne
Till Antony and Cleopatra's loves
Seem like as sparks blown off from his great fire.

Alex. Sparks that may scorch his robe of self-esteem
Some windy day. What are ten thousand proofs?
Give me but one, and all the doubtful rest
Shall sleep beneath my blessing. Where's a proof?
Come, proof, sir.

Jos. Proof? And is there need of proof?
Not that I have it not, but marvel, madam,
That thou wouldst have it.—Lady, pray thee listen.
Dost thou too wish a proof?

Mar. If such there be,
I will not close mine ears against it.

Jos. How!
If such there be! If such there be! Just heaven!
If there be proof that Herod loves thee? Why,
I have one single one that would outsize
Ten thousand thousand!

Alex. Oh, there's room for it.
Come, yield it,—yield, good Joseph.

Jos. Thou, my queen,
Wilt have me speak?

Mar. Ay, if thou carest to.

Jos. Why, then,—but speak not of it to the king:
I know not if he'd like its mentioning,
Though 'twere to prove his love,—ere he set forth
To Laodicea, he did instruct me, madam,—
Commission me——

Alex. Well, on: this wondrous proof,—
I thirst to hear it.—Say you, daughter?

Mar. Ay,
Tell on, good uncle.

Jos. He commissioned me,
So dearly did he love thee, that should death
Be meted him by Antony—in fact,
Should he be put to death——

Mar. To death? What then?

Jos. So doth he worship thee, so doteth on thee,
That he commissioned me, in such event,
In case, as I have said, that Antony——
Who's there? Is't no one? Nay, I saw a figure.
Some one moved near the door, and, o' my word,
This must be kept with us.

Mar. Well, on ! on ! on !
What did he tell thee ?

Jos. That if Antony
Did order him to death,—did slay him, madam,—
If Antony——

Mar. If Antony did what ?
Good uncle, thou'st a Cleopatra tongue,
That thus thou dinnest ever Antony
In Mariamne's ears. They'd hear of Herod.

Jos. Well, then, in short, he did commission me,
If such were his sad fate, to send thee after.

Mar. How, sir ? Not slay me ?

Jos. Ay, that was his order.
So dearly did he love thee that in death—
Even in death—he would not be without thee.

Mar. Oh, mother, mother, take me to thy breast !
I'm but thy child again,—no wife ! no wife !
No wife !

Jos. Why, lady !—

Alex. Dost thou mean to say
That crownéd devil bade thee murder her ?—
My daughter ?

Jos. Nay, not murder.

Alex. He hath murdered,
Why not again ? Blood-lust doth grow with tasting,
And murders breed as summer locusts do.
He hath her brother murdered, why not her ?—
Why not the sister ? Shall there be a limit
Unto a Herod's thirst : when he cries out
For blood to slake it, doth that being live
Who'd dare deny him ? Yea ! For I am she,—
I, Alexandra, rightful queen of Jewry !
What ! call you this a proof ?—a proof of love ?
That she be murdered ? Oh, how he doth love her !
So that's thy proof ? Oh, how he worships her !
It is thy proof, you say ? Witness, O God,
How he must dote upon her ! Mariamne,
Up ! up ! Wilt thou bear this ? Ah ! she hath swooned.
Some water, pray you. Toss me that cushion quickly.
Here, place it here. Water, I pray you, sir. [*Exit JOSEPH.*]
O God of Gods, whose brow is bound with justice,
Whose loins with vengeance,—Thou whose changeless shadow
Breaks on the edge of Space, whose sheltering wings
Enroof the windy temple of the stars,
To whom the stars themselves are but as gold-dust
From noiseless wheels of thy Triumphal Car,—
Thou who of Thine Omnipotence madest man
Visible in Thine image, and invisible
Of Thine own essence,—let not his spilt blood
Cry out to Thee in vain. Judge Thou, O Jah,

The murderer of Aristobulus,
 Of him who as my son was dear indeed,
 But as thy high-priest precious beyond words!
 Judge Thou in all the would-be murderer
 Of this mine other child, the lawful daughter
 Of Alexander Thine anointed king!
 Judge him by his desires, not by his deeds,
 And Thou wilt have to make another hell
 To scorch another Satan!

SCENE III.—*Another room in the palace.*

Enter SALOME, laughing.

Sal. Oh, fool, fool, fool! Oh, excellent, sweet fool!
 Sweet husband fool! Sweet, simple, foolish Joseph!
 How thou hast played into mine hands with this!
 To tell her that,—ha! ha!—to tell her that,
 Of all things in the world, to prove his love!
 When thou art dead, mine own dear fool of fools,
 I will turn Roman and erect a temple
 Unto thy godlike memory! Oh, this—
 This is beyond my utmost expectation,—
 Mine enemy to toss into my lap
 The ball of fate,—my loyal husband—oh!
 I never loved him until now! ha! ha!
 What wisdom's in the fooling of some fools!
 Here comes my brother.—This will please you, brother,—
 Sweet brother, this will please you when you hear it.
 Wilt have the bracelet made to an arrow-head
 To reach my heart, good brother? Nay, not yet,—
 Not yet, by that of Herod that's mine own!
 Farewell, sweet brother, till thou hear'st this news.
 Oh, Joseph, thou hast made me bride again.
 I am again in love with thee for this!—
 Oh, darling fool! Ha! ha! ha! ha! *[Exit, laughing.]*

Enter HEROD, folding some papers, followed by Attendant.

Her. Run after Saramallas with these papers,
 And bid the queen attend me. *[Exit Attendant.]*

How accursed
 These quarrels that divide us! I am thirsty
 Already for her lips. Her angry eyes
 Yet paint the air with horror.—Death! that look—
 That look she gave me! Yet I did deserve it;
 Ay, ay, 'twas well deserved. How her lips curled,
 Like threads that writhe in fire, and her thin nostrils
 Sucked like a veil blown o'er an open mouth.
 I swear, were she but angry with another,
 I should more love her angry than composed!
 Ah, she is here. My blood leaps hard to meet her.

Now, as I live, she shall be friends with me,
Or I will make an enemy of God!

Enter MARIAMNE.

My queen!

Not thine

Mar.
In anything.

Her. What, madam?

Mar. Neither queen,
Nor wife, nor friend, nor slave, of thine.

Her. What, madam?

Mar. My name is Mariamne. I am sister
To Aristobulus,—that Aristobulus
Who died conveniently.

Her. Why, what is this?

Mar. The truth in person.

Her. Mariamne, thou—
Even thou mayst go too far.

Mar. How? To my grave?

Her. Hast thou gone mad?

Mar. If to face fate be madness.

Her. Is this some trick,—some fantasy?

Mar. Why, no.
It is my freedom's birthday.

Her. How? Thy freedom?

Mar. Have I not said? I am mine own and God's:
None other owns so much as the sixth share
In my least drop of blood.

Her. Dost thou defy me?

Mar. No, Herod; I despise thee.

Her. What?

Mar. Despise
And scorn thee.

Her. Thou art mad,—I'm sure of it;
Ay, thou art mad,—mad,—mad!

Mar. If it be madness
To scorn thee, I am mad.

Her. To scorn me? Thou?
To scorn me? Thou, whom I have loved!—God! loved!

Mar. Loved? Loved? Blaspheme not Love's most holy
name,
Lest he do blast thee. What, thou love? What! thou?—
Herod, and say thou'st loved? Oh, love most mighty,
Most infinite, most tender, to contemplate
The murder of the thing it loved!

Her. The murder?
Wert thou not mad——

Mar. The murder,—ay, the murder.
What! thou canst stand and bare thine eyes to mine,
And speak of love? Oh, wise to make my butcher

Him whom thou didst suspect me with,—ay, Herod,
The man whom thou didst think my paramour!

Her. What dost thou mean?

Mar. That thou didst love me well
Most well and nobly, when thou ordered'st Joseph,
If thou wert slain by Marc Antonius,
To slay me also, whom thou dost so love!

Her. Who told thee this? Who told thee this, I say?

Mar. Joseph himself.

Her. Adulteress!

Mar. Sir——

Her. Ay,

Adulteress! Now know I thou art false.
What! dost thou think a man would give such words
Unto a woman lest there were between them
A tie more strong than death?—would thus brave death,
Nay, woo death as a bride? Cursed be ye both!
Thou, woman, thou, whom I have called my wife,
May there be drouht throughout thy treacherous veins
As in a land accursed! Ay, mayst thou shrivel
To a lank, eye-blasting horror day by day,
Until a million million lagging years
Have sucked thy blood, as babes once sucked thy breast
When thou wast Herod's wife!

Mar. Thy coward curse
I do shake off as 'twere a stained garment.
God is with me. Thou, Herod, stand'st alone.
Thou hast scared even pity from thy side
With those foul words. There is my crown,—there all
Of Mariamne that remains to thee!

[*Flings her crown at his feet, and Exit.*]

Her. Oh, God! I choke! Wine, there! Nay, blood,—
blood,—blood! [*Exit.*]

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—*A room in HEROD's palace.*

Enter HEROD, laughing.

Her. Am I called Herod, and shall Fate laugh at me?
No, I will laugh at Fate!——
Ha! ha! ha! ha! Oh, I have been well fooled,—
Herod the Fool, not Herod King of Jewry.
Who was the man in Egypt had a treasurer
Called Joseph? But that Joseph was not false.
Potiphar's Joseph unto Herod's Joseph
Was as the smile of God unto His frown.
God's frown? Ay, God can frown; but so can Herod.
And Herod's wife to Potiphar's? Ay, there—

There is the matter : my wife unto Potiphar's
 Is as one drop of mud unto another !
 Oh, curse her ! curse her ! What ! false unto me ?—
 My queen, and with my treasurer ? Both false ?
 Not even the cutting comfort of his truth
 To hug ? Adulteress ! adulteress !
 Now let such angels as cry " Holy ! " thrice
 Before the throne of God, so shriek that word
 " Adulteress " that she may hear it ring
 From heaven to hell, when she doth stand in pride
 Before the throne of Satan ! May she live
 To die ten times a pulse-beat ! May starved fiends,
 With faces like her children's, gnaw her heart
 And spit it in her eyes to dry her tears !
 May she be Baal's drudge, and bear him devils
 To rend her paramour ! God ! God ! God ! God !
 That I were but Thyself, to revise hell
 And multiply capacity for pain
 By all the worlds in space !

Enter SOHEMUS.

Soh. I am here, my liege.

Her. Go bid my mother and Salome hither.

Ay, let her come. [*Exit SOHEMUS.*] 'Tis well that she should
 come.

She shall this dainty pleasure share with me.

For every pang of anguish I endure,

She shall be torn with two,—ay, with a hundred.

Oh, devil, devil, to have told me of it !

And yet I'd know. But 'twas a devil's errand.

[*Enter SALOME and CYPROS.*

So, madam, thou hast come,—and thou ? Ye're welcome.

The day is fair.

Sal. What mean'st thou ?

Her. What mean'st thou ?

Sal. When ?

Her. When thou brought'st me that bracelet ?

Sal. Why,

My meaning was as easily observed

As was the bracelet.

Her. [*Seizing her by the throat.*] Darest thou, jade ? So ! so !

Cyp. Herod, hold off thy hands ! Thou'lt choke her !

Her. Ay,

By God's help or the devil's, so I will.

Cyp. Thou'rt mad !—Help, ho ! The king is mad !

Her. 'Tis madness

To say a king is mad. Well, there she is :

Mayst thou rejoice in her !

Cyp. Thou hast half killed her.

Her. Would it were wholly ! Serpents die not thus.

Cyp. Thou art a fiend !

Her. Else were I not her brother.

Look thou,—thou, madam, who art lying there,—

Die not ere thy reward be given thee.

I took thee for a liar, but in all

Thou hast been true,—I do acknowledge it,—

In all,—in all. I've somewhat roughly used thee,

But thou shalt have amends,—ay, ay, amends.

What thinkest thou 'twill be ? Thou canst not dream,

Canst thou, poor dove ? thou art so sadly ruffled

Since thou didst choose to preen thy dainty feathers

Betwixt a tiger's paws,—poor dove, poor dove !

But there shall be reward.

Cyp. Speak what thou meanest.

Canst thou not see she is half dead—poor girl !—

With thy rough usage ?

Her. She shall have a toy

To soothe her waking,—ay, a pretty ball

To toss withal, of red and white and black.

Like you the colors ?

Sal. Dost thou mean in truth

Thou hast aught for me ?

Her. Ay.

Sal. What is it ?

Her. Why,

Thy husband's head !—Without, there, ho ! [*Enter Attendant.*

Send Sohemus

Straightway unto me.—What ! dost pale ? What ! thou,

A Joseph's wife, and pale ? Thou ! thou ! Oh, thou

Shalt feel what 'tis to suffer.— [*Enter SOHEMUS.*

Sohemus,

Take forth this woman's husband, the Idumean

Joseph, sometime my trusted treasurer,

And let him not return.

Sal. How ! Banish him ?

Her. No.

Sal. What then ?

Her. Slay him.

Sal. Never ! thou wouldst not.

Her. Soft ! shall I break a promise ? 'Twas my word.

Thou shalt be paid in full,—in full,—in full.

By God ! I am half minded that thy lap

Should serve as block for his beheading !—Sir,

Away unto thy office !—Ay, there, crouch,—

Crouch, thou foul, damnéd thing. What ! still so white,

For all thy well-daubed red ? Ere it be night

Thou shalt have blood for paint !

Cyp. My son !—my son !

Her. No son of thine, to call that monster sister.

—Let me not thrice remind thee, Sohemus :
To work without delay. To work !

Soh.

But, sire——

Her. Tempt me not thrice, I say. Begone !

[SOHEMUS attempts to go, but SALOME clings to him
and prevents him from leaving.]

Sal.

By God,

He shall not till I know what thou dost purpose.

Her. Why, then remain, good Sohemus ; remain.

'Twill give me joy such as kings seldom know

To tell her what I purpose. It is this.

With the first western streak of evening red,

It is my purpose—wilt thou write it down ?

Here are my tablets, if thou hast none. No ?

So be it. As I said, with the first stain

Of blood from Night's wound on the brow of Day

The blood of thy sweet spouse shall stain likewise

The sword of him I shall appoint herewith

To strike his fair head from his comely neck.

'Tis now some minutes short of sunseting.

Let Sohemus place a chair beside this window

Ere he goes forth. Methinks, it is but just

That after all thy crafty painstaking

Thou shouldst enjoy results unto the full.

The execution will take place there,—seest thou ?—

Beneath that date-tree.—Sohemus, a chair.

Sal. Thou wouldst not do it !

Her.

No, I'll have it done.

From childhood I've abhorred the sight of blood,

Save when it's battle-shed : it turns me faint.

Wilt thou not have the chair ?

Sal.

Thou couldst not kill him.

Her. What didst thou think that I would do, sweet sister,

When thou hadst proved him false ? Have him to sup ?

A higher honor waits him, trust me, madam :

He shall be Herod's chief ambassador

To Satan, and his power unlimited.

There are some things in hell that I'd have changed,—

Ay, some in heaven. Thou'rt pale. Nay, have the chair.

Sal. If thou wouldst kill him, let her die with him.

Her. Make her ambassadress who was a queen ?

It were not seemly.

Sal.

'Tis the law of Jewry

That both should die.

Her.

Herod is Herod's law.

Sal. Brother, I lied ! In all I lied ! In everything
I was a liar !

Her.

Ay, and thou dost lie,
In all thou liest, and in everything
Thou art a liar, still !—

Sal.

Good brother, hear me——

Her. A Herod hear a liar?

Sal.

'Twas her fault,—

Not his, but hers.

Her.

Devil! I'd shed his blood

To wipe those words out, if for nothing else!

What! thou art not yet satisfied? God's wrath!

I'll make thee drain a goblet of his blood

Unto my health! Away! The west is red;

The headsman's sword is thirsty.

Sal.

Herod——

Her.

Nay,

Remind me not that I am Herod, woman,

If thou wouldst gain thy plea.

Sal.

Brother——

Her.

That's worse.

Sal. As Jewry's king I kneel to thee.

Her.

As wife

To an adulterous hound I spurn thee.

Sal. [*To CYPROS.*]

Madam,

Help me to plead.

Cyp.

Wilt thou not hear me, sir?

Her. No! for thou art her mother.—Sohemus,

Forth on my errand.

Sal. [*Clinging to SOHEMUS.*] Nay, he shall not.

Cyp.

Sir,

Think what thou doest.

Soh.

Ay, in God's name, sire——

Her. In mine own name I do command thee forth.—

Unhand him, madam. Thou weak, snivelling wretch,

Unloose him, or I will compel thee,—thus.—

[*Dragging SALOME away from SOHEMUS.*]

Sohemus, forth upon my errand. Lo!

The west is yet more red! Ha! ha! ha! ha!

SCENE II.—*Enter MARIAMNE.*

Mar. Oh, God! that I were dead!—that I were dead!—

That I were dead!—or that I had not lived

To be the sepulchre of mine own heart!

What! Mariamne called adulteress

By Herod? Herod call me that? Just heaven!

All things are possible after this thing!

Oh, that foul name! Would he had sent his sword

To find the utmost secret of my heart,

Or ever my quick ears had sucked that poison!

Where shall I turn for comfort?—Is to live

Always to wish for death? Now, were it so,

And my veins nourishing an unborn child,

I'd spill their plenty unto lapping dogs

Ere breath should be its portion! Let me think,—

Ay, let me think. He shed my brother's blood,
 And my blood feeds the hearts of his two sons.
 What horror were beyond this horrible?
 Ay, there is one. He hath been loved by me!
 I've held his murderous hands, played with the curls
 That warmed his murder-pregnant brain,—ay, kissed—
 Oft kissed the lips that spoke the murdering words,
 Lain down my head above the awful secret
 His heart so well did keep! Oh, God! oh, God!
 Must I know this and live? Sweet heaven, but rid me
 Of this disgracéd body, and my soul
 Upon the wind of knowledge may be blown
 Eternally an alien and accursed,
 Yet I will think Thee merciful.

Enter ALEXANDER with pomegranate-flowers.

Alex. Look, mother,
 Sweet, mother, look! Here are pomegranate-flowers,
 To make thee think thou'rt in Samaria.
 Are those more beautiful? Look, mother!

Mar. Nay,
 Nay, do not touch me! do not speak to me!
 Oh, look not so, my heart,—my life,—my son,—
 Mine, and not his! Come, touch me! touch me! touch me!
 Speak to me! kiss me! clasp me! let me hear
 Ten thousand words of love!

Alex. Why dost thou hold me?
 Thou'lt crush the flowers. And pray thee tell me, mother,
 Why wast not pleased at first? Have I been naughty?
 I thought thou'dst like the flowers so much.

Mar. I do,—
 I do. The pretty flowers,—ay, they are lovely,
 And colored like to blood,—like unto blood.

Alex. Why dost thou say it so? The ugly word!
 I hate that word,—that "blood." Wilt thou not wear them?

Mar. Ay, ay,—upon my heart,—there is the place.
 Look not at me out of his eyes. Dost hear?
 Thou hast his eyes, I say! Do not look at me!

Alex. Mother!

Mar. No, not that word! Dost hear me, boy?
 Why, they're his very eyelids! Get thee gone!
 Away with thee! Oh, God! Come back! come back!
 I did not mean it. Look at me, nor weep!
 I did not mean it. Look, I'll drink thy tears
 With kisses. Would that they were poisonous!
 Is this the dagger that I gave thee? Come,—
 Give it to me again, and here—— [*Uncovering her neck.*]

Alex. Nay, mother,
 What dost thou mean? Take care! It is so sharp;
 I sharpened it to-day.

Mar. To-day is well ;
To-day should every sword throughout Judea
Be newly whetted, and their edges proved
Upon one heart !

Alex. At what dost look so hard ?

Mar. Upon that glare of steel. Stand not like that,—
'Tis so he stands a hundred times a day.

Move,—walk,—change that position,—anything,
So thou dost not look like him. Yes,—thy flowers,—
Thy flowers. When hast thou seen thy father ? Nay,
I mean thou must not name him unto me
So long as thou dost live. Dost understand ?

Alex. I must not name my father to thee ?

Mar. Ay,
Thou must not.

Alex. Why ? Dost thou not like his name ?
I will not say his name.

Mar. Thou'lt not speak of him
In any wise. Dost hear ?

Alex. Ay, mother, but——

Mar. Where didst thou get these flowers ? They are so fresh.
Didst thou think of it all of thine own self ?

There is one pity : they have not a perfume.
Perfume's the soul of flowers. I think such flowers
As have no perfume will not bloom in heaven,
But perish, with the beasts. Thou hast not seen him,—
Thy father,—then, to-day ? Nay, speak not ! Look,
Here is the way the fruit begins to grow.

Did he speak to thee ? Nay, no word,—no word.
There, go ! go ! go ! Bring me some flowers, my heart,
That have sweet perfumes. Run ! run ! run !

[*Exit* ALEXANDER.]

SCENE III.—*Enter* HEROD and DOSITHEUS.

Her. A letter from Hyrcanus unto Malchus ?
Malchus ? What should Hyrcanus with this Malchus ?

Dos. My liege, I'd have thee read. My tongue rebels :
'Twill not be proxy for disloyal words.

Her. Disloyal ?

Dos. When thou'st read the letter, sire,
I think thou wilt agree with me.

Her. Disloyal ?
He gave it to thee ?

Dos. He and Alexandra.

Her. Ah ! Alexandra ! Well, I'll read it. So !
An escort to Arabia ! That's well,—
Excellent. Ay, I'm very glad to know
He's in such gallant health. An escort, sir,
Unto Arabia ! He's somewhat aged—

Think you?—to look on travelling as a pleasure.
I'm glad his health's so good.

Dos. Was I right, sire,
To bring the letter to thee?

Her. Right,—most right.
'Tis at all times a cheering thing, Dositheus,
To know thy wife's grandfather is in health.
It cheers me, sir,—it cheers me, verily.
I thought he coughed of late.

Dos. And so he doth.

Her. No matter : he'd ride double with his cough
Into Arabia. It cannot, sir,
Be very heavy. Come, re-seal this letter.

Dos. Seal it?

Her. Ay, seal it. And when it is sealed,
Bear it, as thou wast told to do, to Malchus.

Dos. My liege?

Her. Sir, I have said.

Dos. That I this letter
Bear to Arabia's governor?

Her. Ay.

Dos. Sire,
Thou canst not understand its full import.

Her. Possibly.

Dos. But, my lord, take it to Malchus?
How if he answers it?

Her. Dositheus,
It is not how if he will answer it,
But, if he answers, how it will be answered.

Dos. I think I comprehend thy meaning, sire.

Her. Think not, but act. Take thou the fleetest horse
From out my stables, and to Malchus,—ho!
To Malchus ere 'tis night! Dositheus,
Be prompt, and thou shalt win a higher place
Than even now thou hast in mine esteem.
Away to Malchus.

Dos. I will ride, my lord,
As lover to his maid. Trust me in all. [Exit.

Her. [Looking after him.] In all but all. This works to
thine advantage :
Therefore I trust thee. Were Hyrcanus king,
Thou shouldst not be the letter-carrier
Of Herod, good Dositheus,—no, no,
I promise thee! God! how my head burns! Oh!
It is as though my skull were but a crucible
For flames to dance in. Ha! ha! ha! That's famous!
A crownéd crucible! I've not the knack
Of fitting big ideas to little words:
I'm Herod,—more a poem than a poet.
Poets are mad, they say,—leastwise in Persia;

Well, I'm in Jewry, and I'm not a poet,
 Ergo, not mad; yet I've sometimes bethought me,
 If the worst madness were not sanity,
 To be most mad's to think thyself most sane.
 But if thou'rt sane and think'st thou mayest be mad?
 How then? Were it not better many times
 To be unknowing mad?—honestly raving?
 'Tis not a pleasant task at hush of night
 To daub upon the canvas of the future
 Such scenes as thou mayst choose to conjure up
 When thou shalt have declared a war 'gainst Reason.
 'Tis better to dream sleeping than awake.
 Traitors go mad sometimes, so I have heard,
 For thinking on their sins; beggars, they say,
 Are sometimes starved to madness; felons, too,
 Rave in the galleys. I do oftentimes wonder
 If madness ever seized a king? Ay, ay,
 Nebuchadnezzar grazed; but Balaam's ass
 Forsook his asshood and adopted speech:
 It is a serious question which was madder,—
 The man who took the ass's method, or
 The ass who took the method of the man.
 I'll have my chief interpreter take notes
 Upon that theme,—if Balaam's ass was mad.
 On his decision hangs a serious question:
 Nebuchadnezzar's sanity.—What's that? [*A scream without.*]
 What's that, I say?

Enter ALEXANDER, running, pale as death.

Alex. Oh, father, father, father!

Her. What is it? Speak, I say! Where is thy tongue?
 Speak, o' the instant! Is thy mother—— Ha!
 What o' thy mother?

Alex. Mother doth not know.
 Oh, come with me,—quick,—quick!

Her. What is it, sir?
 God! I will know.

Alex. Oh, sir,—I know it's false,—
 But they have bound my uncle Joseph. Oh!
 The cords have cut him so! They say, moreo'er,
 'Tis thy command, and that he must be killed,—
 His head chopped off. Oh, father, come!—don't wait!
 I know thou'lt come. He kissed me; and he wept;
 He said thou hadst his blessing; and the blood
 Was all upon his wrists, and on his robe,
 And they are cutting off his beard and hair.
 Oh, come! come! come!

Her. Well, boy, why should I come?

Alex. Oh, father, please be different; mock me not,—
 Mock me not now: afterwards thou mayst tease me

Until my heart is like to burst, but now—
 Oh, quickly, father, quickly give me leave
 To have chopped off the heads of those who seized him.
 Oh, 'twas so pitiful!
 He'd just begun to show me how a storm—
 A sand-storm in the desert—smothered men
 And camels. Come! come! come!
 The cord has cut so deep into his wrists!
 Come, father!

Her. How if I told thee I had ordered this?

Alex. Oh, do not mock! 'Twill be too late! Oh, come!

Her. Thy uncle Joseph dies at my command.

Alex. Oh, no! no! no!

Her. I say he doth.

Alex. And I,

That thou art mad to say it.

Her. Mad!

Alex. Ay, mad!

Oh, father, come! I kneel.

Her. It is too late.

Alex. No! no! not if thou'lt hurry.

Her. I do tell thee

It is too late. [*Turns to window.*] Ha! there he is.—Good uncle,
 Good-even to thee. Bear King Lucifer
 Word of my everlasting fealty. So!
 Up in my arms, boy. Look!

Alex. [*Shrieks.*] Oh, uncle! uncle!

Speak to him, father! Oh! the sword! the sword!
 Make him put up his sword.—We're coming, uncle!
 Uncle, we're coming.—Oh, why doth he kneel?
 Why doth he bend his neck? Oh, God! oh, God!
 The blood! the blood! the blood!

[*Turns suddenly with a wild gesture.*]

Thou'rt not my father!—

Thou art a devil. Devils wear not crowns.

There, devil!

[*Snatches off his father's crown and flings it out
 of the window, then swoons.*]

Her. [*Dashing him down.*] Not thy father? I believe thee.

ACT V.

SCENE I.—*A room in HEROD'S palace.*

Enter SALOME and Cup-Bearer.

Sal. The king returns to-day.

Cup-Bearer. Ay, madam.

Sal. Well,

Art sure thou knowest thy part?

Cup-Bearer.

Hear me, and see.

Sal. Be quick, then. Soft! I'll draw this curtain first.
Now, quickly.

Cup-Bearer. First, then, madam, I'm to wait
Till thou send'st for me; then, on some occasion
When the king hath had words more violent
Than usual with the queen, I enter in,
Hastily, yet with a composéd mien,
That I may seem assured in every way
As to the service I'm about to render.
Next I do tell the king Queen Mariamne
Hath coaxed me to assist her in the mixture
Of a love-potion, all of whose ingredients
I do not know; that this was kept a secret
From all but us who brewed it; that I thought
My safest course, both for myself and him,
Was to confess it all. Is not that right?

Sal. Ay, ay. But shouldst thou falter——

Cup-Bearer.

I'll not falter,

Trust me, good madam, I have not forgotten
The day she had me scourged for making free
To pinch the ears of Aristobulus
For sprinkling me with water. I'll not shrink.
Her servants' whips have sealed me to thy service.

Sal. Well, go thy ways till I have need of thee.
Go with a usual face: purse not thy brows,
Nor look as though thy heart hung on thy ribs
A bag o' secrets. Go: some one is coming.
Think of the gold that shall be thine. That's well.
Now go.—Ha! it is she herself. Go quickly! [*Exit Cup-Bearer.*]

Enter MARIAMNE.

Good-morrow, murderess.

Mar. Wouldst thou, poor wretch,
Raise anger from the dead? Thy woes, Salome,
Make me forbearing.

Sal. So they make not me,
Proud-nostrilled harlot!

Mar. Darest thou?

Sal. Dare I? God,
Help me to laugh! Ha! ha! ha! ha! Dare I?

Mar. Nay, I forgot, — thou'rt mad. Poor, fond, weak
wretch,
In seeking my destruction thou hast compassed
Thy husband's death.

Sal. Wilt thou remind me of it?
Take that! [*Stabs at her.*]

Mar. [*Quietly, holding her by both wrists.*] Yes, I will take
it, verily,
But not as thou didst mean that I should take it.

I am as far thy better in my body
 As in my soul. There! get thee gone!—away!—
 Ere I am tempted unto what I would not.
 I'll keep thy dagger as a dear memento
 Of this most gentle scene; and should my heart
 Grow soft in thinking of thy grief, my soul
 Shall profit by the lesson of this steel.
 Go, woman.

Sal. Ay, I go,—to come again.

[*Exit.*

Mar. Murderess? Yea, I feel a murderess.
 Ah, Joseph, had I known,—had I but known,—
 Torture could not have wrung those words from me,
 For I'd have wedded dumbness on the rack.
 O God, O God, is this Thy king?—this Herod?—
 This Mariamne's husband?—this rage-buffed
 And passion-driven slayer of the innocent?—
 This king whose humors rule him?—this fond fool
 Who wears distemper's motley, and whose crown
 Is but a badge of sin? Rather hath not
 Some devil dispossessed his soul, to reign
 Over his body's kingdom?
 Oh, this is not the man whose bride I was,
 The king whose queen, the conqueror whose wife!
 Ah me! we women, how have we vexed Love,
 That he doth scourge us speak we but his name?
 I will be gentle with her, for the sake
 Of him who was her husband; but this dagger
 Shall keep me ever cautious.

Enter HEROD.

Her. What say you?

Mar. I spoke, sir, with a ghost.

Her. Ha?

Mar. With a ghost

Which was thy handicraft.

Her. Woman!

Mar. A ghost

That wore a scarlet collar,—one whose head
 Was plastered on with blood.

Her. Away, thou fiend!

Mar. Nay, send me not away: I should much please thee.
 There is the making of a pretty ghost
 In me, my lord, and scarlet is my color.

Her. Devil!

Mar. Nay, wife to one.

Her. [*Drawing a dagger.*] Begone, I say!

Mar. Ay, strike! Thou hast a genius, sire, believe me,
 For ghost-making. Strike! there is nothing—ay,
 Nothing in all the world would so enchant me
 As being made a ghost to haunt thee! Nay,

Glare not as I already were a ghost.
 I see thou art not in a loving mood :
 Therefore I will begone. Great king of ghosts,
 Good-morrow.

[Exit.

Her. I said that I'd have blood,—I said so,—ay,
 But there is not enough in all the land
 To slake my humor's thirst. Oh that I were
 Another Pharaoh, and another Moses
 Would turn the Nile to blood a second time,
 That I might swim through its encrimsoned waves !
 Oh that I were a thing of quenchless thirst,
 A vampire monstrous, flattened at the throat
 Of one vast body which should be the flesh
 Incorporate of every thing alive !

Enter DOSITHEUS.

Dositheus,

Is't thou ?

Dos. My liege, the letter.*Her.* How ? From Malchus ?*Dos.* From Malchus, sire.*Her.* That's well ; that's well. Ah ha !

Look here, Dositheus : what think you, man,
 Of that,—and that,—and that ?
 He will not only send an escort, sir,
 To his beloved Hyrcanus,—dost thou mark ?—
 But will make welcome all whom he may bring,
 Even all the Jews that may be of his party,
 And he shall lack for nothing. God of Israel !
 There's one thing that he shall not lack for,—death !

Dos. My liege——*Her.* So the good Malchus doth agree ?*Dos.* My liege——

Her. I'll show this letter to the Sanhedrim,
 And he shall straightway suffer to the utmost
 The law that deals with traitors !

Dos. But, my liege——

Her. Away ! Send me Hyrcanus and his daughter.
 Bid them at once attend me.

[Exit DOSITHEUS.

Would to heaven
 His withered veins held more of that red fluid
 Which can alone quench my insatiate thirst !
 Such drops as death may wring from his dry body
 Will but make wet the door-way of a throat
 That gapes for rivers.

Enter HYRCANUS and ALEXANDRA.

Thou art come, my lord.
 I'm glad to see that thou'rt not more infirm.
 I pray thee, sit.—Sit, madam.

Alex. No, I'll stand.

I can breathe better standing. What is it?

Her. Why, sure thou wouldst not hear before thy father,—
Thou who art courteous to thy waiting-woman
And cry thy needle pardon if thou breakest it?—
Thou'lt sit, sir?

Hyr. Yes, I thank thy courtesy,
I'm better friends with bed each day I live.

Her. Yet thou'rt industrious for an old man, sir.

Hyr. Industrious?

Her. Ay; thou doest many things
Which young men could not better.

Hyr. I, my son?

Alex. What dost thou mean?

Her. Softly, good mother-in-law :
I speak unto thy father.—Good Hyrcanus,
Thou hast a talent that I dreamed not of.

Hyr. Thou flatterest me, sir. I won a crown
From the Athenian senate once; but, truth,
'Twas long ago.

Her. The thing of which I speak
Might, sir, have won thee back the crown of Jewry,
Had it succeeded.

Alex. What?

Her. I speak, my friend,
Of this thy unsuspected talent——

Alex. Well?

Her. Of letter-writing. [*Shows him the letter.*]

I assure thee, sir,
I could not trace—upon my honor, sir—
Characters clearer or more shapely.

Hyr. Daughter,
It is some jest, is't not? Pray you, inform me :
I never had the trick o' jest-catching.

Alex. Father, come with me. Ay, it is a jest,—
It is a jest. Come, father; come, Hyrcanus.

Her. Stay, both of ye! Stir not a step!—A jest?
A jest to make hell merry!

What! wouldst feign ignorance, thou damnéd traitress?—

Thou, sir, dost thou in truth dare to pretend

Thou dost not recognize this letter?—this,—

The one thou sent'st unto Arabia's governor,—

To Malchus? Ha! I touch thee! Good my lord,

This Malchus is an honest friend o' thine.

Look! he will send thee escort. Look! thy party,

Even such Jews as thou mayest take with thee,

Will be provided for. Look here,—and here!

Thou shalt not want for aught. Oh, would to heaven

That I had such a friend!—that this same Malchus

Were Herod's friend [*ALEXANDRA sinks half fainting into a chair*].—What, madam, wilt thou sit, Now that thy father stands? It is not seemly. Up on thy feet: thou canst breathe better so. [*Laughing.*] Methinks thou shouldst thank God with all thy breath That thou dost breathe at all!

Alex. It was my fault: Lay all the blame on me,—on me.

Her. Attend. This is thy father's signature, is't not?

Alex. I teased him to it. Oh, if any suffers, It should be I!

Hyr. Nay, nay, thou must not suffer: It was my fault to let thee bring me to it. I am old, Herod, but not yet so old As to have outlived courage. Weep not, daughter; I'll bear the fullest consequence;—weep not: Would I could weep!

Her. Thou shalt, and tears of blood.— Without, there, ho! [*Enter Attendants.*] Lead forth this man straightway

Unto the palace prison, and send Sohemus Unto me in my closet.

Alex. Thinkest thou, Herod, While Alexandra still is Alexandra, Her father shall be fingered by a slave?— Thou knave, thou durst not touch him.—Father, come; Come with me,—so.—Thou, sirrah, lead the way.— Good father, lean on me.

Hyr. I'm very old; Death hath been close to me for many years. I am not frightened. Hath he naught to say?— Naught of his reasons?

Alex. He hath none to speak of. Come, come, come, come.

Hyr. Well, I am old, and death is like a friend Who comes disguised as an enemy. Think'st thou he'll let me speak to Mariamne And to her pretty boys?

Alex. Ay, ay. Come on.

Hyr. Her boys are like her, but one hath his eyes. Well, well, I've lived to be so old that death— Even death will not seem new to me. Lead on.— Farewell, Antipater.

[*Exeunt.*]

Her. That's over. Would it were to do again! Her face—ha! ha!—her face was sure the servant Of a most furious soul. I can believe it,— That 'twas her plot; yet he must die for it. And who can say Antipater is cruel When he doth give another that one thing

Which he desires,—a swift and sudden death?
 What's cruelty? A tree whose roots split hell,
 Whose crest disturbs the stars. Methinks my star
 Hath long since been a cinder, and its fire
 Is all here in my brain. Do men go mad
 For dreading madness? [*Enter MARIAMNE.*]
 Ha! What wouldst thou?

Mar. Madman!

Is this thing true?

Her. Why dost thou call me madman?

I am not mad.

Mar. Is this thing true, I say?

Hast thou given orders that he be imprisoned?—
 Hyrcanus?

Her. Wherefore didst thou call me madman?

Thou never call'dst me so till now.

Mar. Till now

Thou ne'er wast mad. Give answer to my question.
 Hast sent Hyrcanus unto prison?

Her. Ay.

Mar. Thou hast?—O God, where is Thy justice?

Her. Look you,

Why said you I was mad? I am not so.

Was I e'er calmer?

Mar. Thou hast sent Hyrcanus

To prison, under charge of treachery?—

Hyrcanus,—he who was a king in all

To make thee seem his sceptre's shadow!

Her. Now—

Why, now, now, now—look now how calm I am!

Seem I a madman?

Mar. —He who is still king.

By every right which cries thee wrong!—a man

To make thy memory a woman,—one

Beside whom thou dost show as black-ribbed clouds

Against an evening sun! Thou send Hyrcanus

To prison? Thou? Thou,—Herod? Now let Satan

Send God to hell that he may rule in heaven!

What! he in prison at thy order?—he

Who even with sin dealt ever holily,—

He whose white hair the very winds did reverence,—

He unto whom thy every dignity

Thou owest,—thy wealth, thy crown, thy throne, thy sceptre,

That very power which now doth wrong him! Oh,

Let me believe thee mad, ere that thy reason

Cried "Amen" to this deed!

Her. He is a traitor.

Mar. And what art thou? thou who usurped his throne,
 Who filched his crown, who stole away his sceptre,
 Who hath his grandchild called adulteress?

Ay, what art thou,—thou, sir, whose name is Herod,
Whose heart is hell condensed?

Her. Thou sayest, a madman.

Mar. No! no! thou art not mad! Look not like that.
When thou didst order him to prison, then,—
Then wast thou mad. Not now; not now.

Her. I am not?

Mar. No, no, I tell thee. What dost stare at? Come,
Thou didst not mean it: I am sure o' that.
Look! I'll forget my wrongs,—all, all, all, all,—
So thou dost not wrong him.

Her. Why, it were madness
To set him free. I would not give the people
So good a cause to say that I am mad.

Mar. They could not have a better cause than this
That now they have in his imprisonment.
What! will the foulest beggar in the streets
Think that in sanity thou wouldst imprison
A gentle, fond, feeble, retired old man
For treachery? Nay, but believe me, Herod,
Thou'st ta'en the surest way to prove thy madness.

Her. Say it no more.

Mar. Say what? That thou art mad?
Then give me no more cause to say it. See!
I've forgot all but what should be remembered,—
That I am Mariamne and thy wife,
Thy queen, the mother of thy sons. Take me,
And set Hyrcanus free!

Her. What! wilt thou kiss me?

Mar. Yes.

Her. What! be as my wife again?

Mar. Yes,—yes!

All that I was, and more, I will be, Herod,
So thou dost set him free.

Her. Wilt love me too?

Mar. I will be all to thee that thou couldst wish.

Her. Save loving?

Mar. If thou dost find fault with me,
Send me to prison in Hyrcanus' stead.

Her. Then thou'lt not swear to love me?

Mar. Oh, my lord,

What deed could better merit love than this one
I'd have thee do? As thou'lt some day be old,
Think on his age, and do him reverence.

Her. Nay,

I am not old, and think of thee each moment.
Is that the way to calmness?

Mar. What's his crime?

Or who hath slandered him? His innocence
I'll prove sire, with my life.

Her. [*Handing her Malchus's letter.*] Not with thy love?
Read that. The governor's reply is here,
On this side,—here.

Mar. [*Reading.*] Would go to Asphaltites
And to Arabia. Would have an escort,
He and my mother. Signed Hyrcanus.—Well,
What's there of treachery? I see no harm here.

Her. No harm? Thou seest no harm in it? No harm!
No harm! No harm! But soft! soft! soft! Read on.
Read Malchus' answer.

Mar. Escort granted them;
All done in's power to aid them; shelter promised
Unto his party.—Well?

Her. No,—ill, by God!
Give me the papers: thou wilt tear them, girl.
We'll see if that the Sanhedrim thinks with thee.
No harm! [*Laughing.*] 'Tis harm to think there is no harm.

Mar. Thou canst not purpose to submit those letters
Unto the Sanhedrim?

Her. It is my purpose,—
This very moment.

Mar. Herod, hear me!—Look!
Look on me! Look, my lord!—I kneel; I kneel.
Am I less fair than when thou loved'st me?

Her. Wilt swear to love me now?

Mar. All that a wife
Should be I will be.

Her. All save loving. Ay,
Thou dost not love me, and he shall not live
To take the love that should be mine!

Mar. Nay, hear me!

Her. No more! no more! [*Enter Cup-Bearer.*]

Ha, slave! what dost thou there?

Cup-Bearer. My lord, I come on most important matters.

Her. Important matters? Whom do they concern?
Hyrcanus?

Cup-Bearer. No; the queen.

Her. The queen? What queen?—
Queen Mariamne? Well?

Cup-Bearer. Yesterday noon,
Your majesty, the queen did come to me
And ask that I would help her brew a potion—
A love-drink—for your majesty. Being won
By much fine gold, I did consent, but afterwards
Bethought me that, not knowing all the contents
Of that which she had given me, 'twere best
Both for my lord and my lord's faithful servant
That I should tell my lord concerning it.

Her. A love-drink! Ha! for me?—Madam, what's this?

Mar. As bold a lie as ever was well lied.—

Sirrah, hast thou forgot my eunuchs' whips,
That thus thou bravest me?

Cup-Bearer. Your majesty,
I've not forgotten them.

Her. A love-drink! So!
For me? Hast thou this drink?

Cup-Bearer. Not now, my lord.
Princess Salome hath it in her charge.

Mar. [*Aside.*] Salome!

Her. Bid her here at once.

Mar. What, Herod!

Thou'lt hear thy slave and sister before me?
Canst thou not see he lies? Dost thou not know
He is in her employ and hired to lie?—
Thou craven hound! stir not until I bid thee.
Look in mine eyes and say those words again!—
Thou seest: he cannot do it. Mark him, sir:
He cannot look at me.

Her. Canst thou not so?

Cup-Bearer. My lord, mistake me not; it is not fear
Which keeps me from returning the queen's look,
But that my duty unto thee, my liege,
Forbids that I should gaze upon thy consort.

Her. Well said! Well said!—Madam, thou art rebuked.

Mar. Rebuked! and by that worm? Thy queen rebuked!
And by thy cup-bearer?—Now long farewell,
Hyrcanus! Peace be thine,—as must be death.
I have done all for thee that woman could
And yet be woman.

Her. Nay, what dost thou mean?
Where art thou going?

Mar. Where I'll find honor, sir,—
Unto Hyrcanus.

Her. I forbid it!

Mar. I
Am not to be forbidden. Stand aside.
If thou art Herod, I am Mariamne,
And queen unto the end, though crownless.

[*Exit.*

Her. So
Then she is mad,—not I. I am not mad.
Who said so? No one. But they must not think so,—
Not think so, either. I will see a madman
And make comparison.—Ho, there! you, sir,
Do men run mad in Jewry?

Cup-Bearer. Ay, my lord.

Her. Hast thou seen any?

Cup-Bearer. What? Madmen, my lord?

Her. Ay, madmen.

Cup-Bearer. Scores, my lord.

Her. How looked they, slave?—

Seemed they to be in any sort acquainted
With their affliction?

Cup-Bearer. Some did, sire.

Her. Some did?

They were not mad, then—no! they were not mad.
A man may not be mad and know it, slave,
Think'st thou?

Cup-Bearer. Why, yes, my lord, sometimes.

Her. Away!

Away! thou traitorous hound! thou knave! thou villain!
Out of my sight! Dost hint that I am mad?

[*Exit Cup-Bearer.*]

When Herod's mad, let God be writ a fool,
And wisdom's sucklings swarm the throne of heaven.
What! shall a man go mad and talk of it?
No! no! no! no! Cunning is twin to madness.
Madmen will swear unto their sanity
With th' self-same ravings that proclaim them mad.
Why, I am calmer than I was a month—
A week—a day—nay, even a moment past:
I let her go unhanded,—let her word me,—
Took even her insults calmly, where a madman
Had torn her into shreds,—ay, into ribbons!
A potion? A love-potion? Let me see:
That's not so bad. Methinks there's something here
Not altogether venomous. I'll ponder.
What if she loves me after all?—would win me
By crafty means? I've heard that such things happen.
If that were so,—if this love-drink were harmless,—
If—ah! if Mariamne loveth me! Why,
Though hell should burst in flames beneath my feet,
I'd take her back again, and with my kisses
Make its worst blaze seem cool! Oh, I'm on fire,—
On fire! But let me recollect. The potion,—
He said he thought 'twas best to tell me. Why?
Why was it best? Sure there could be no harm,
Unless—unless—ah! there's the thing,—unless
He did suspect that it was poisoned. Ay,
There is a possibility. No matter!
I will not think on it. She poison me?—
She, Mariamne, poison Herod? Well,
I'm glad I am not mad, since were I so
I might have fall'n into this snare. And yet
It is enough to make a Solomon
Cry Wisdom wanton, and as lawful wife
Clip easy Foolishness. Now would to God
That I were mad, to know not of this horror!
Sweet Madness, come, come, come! Scoop out my brains
To feed thy henchmen, and in this racked skull
Take up thy wild abode! Let every cranny

In my once-loving heart be packed with ravellings
 From Fate's accurséd loom, snatch off my crown
 To make the harlot Circumstance a zone,
 And use my sceptre as a rod wherewith
 To scourge all wise men to thy service!

[*Exit.*]

SCENE II.—*A dungeon.*—HYRCANUS and ALEXANDRA.

Hyr. Good daughter, I am weary : loose these chains
 A little.

Alex. Oh, God help me, sir, I cannot!
 Father, thou knowest with what joy of heart
 I'd be there in thy place. Thou knowest that,
 Dost thou not, father? Look! lean so, against me.
 Is it not easier? Here's water, sir,
 If thou art thirsty.

Hyr. No, I'm only tired.
 Thou think'st he'll let me see my little grandsons
 Ere I am led to execution? Speak!
 Dost not, good daughter?

Alex. Nay, talk not like that.
 He would not dare to kill thee.

Hyr. Ay, ay, ay,
 He would. But Mariamne 'll plead for me?
 Thou saidest so, didst not?

Alex. Ay, father.

Hyr. Well,
 'Tis all with her. Why dost thou weep, my daughter?

Alex. Alas! how canst thou ask me why I weep?
 Dost thou not suffer for me? Was 't not I
 Who lured thee to thy ruin? Did not I
 Draw up that paper and then torture thee
 Until thou'dst signed it? And am I not free,
 While thou art fettered? I,—thy daughter,—I,
 Who should have been the comfort of thy age,
 The councillor of all to thy advantage,
 Thy stay in time of trouble! Look, Hyrcanus:
 I brought thee to thy death. Oh! curse me! curse me!
 I kneel to hear thy curses as another

To receive blessings. Let me no more writhe
 Beneath thy gentleness. Come, curse me! curse me!

Hyr. Good daughter, do not weep. If it be death,
 Why, Death and I are friends, and glad to meet.
 And say not 'tis thy fault if that I die;
 For in that letter there was naught, believe me,
 To merit this the law's extremest course.

Alex. No: was there? Was there? Answer quickly, father.
 Thou knowest I only wished to place thee, sir,
 Beyond his reach.

Hyr. I know it. Do not weep.

I know it, daughter. Hark! I hear a footfall.
Hush! listen; listen.

Enter MARIAMNE.

Alex. Mariamne! Oh,
Thou'rt welcome, thou art welcome! Yet thine eyes
Are not as I would have them.

Hyr. Pretty one,
How will it fare with me?

Mar. As it should fare
With him who wrongs thee. Sire, he is a monster,
And his heart petrified long ere this hour
Into the corner-stone of a new hell.

Alex. And thou canst speak so calmly, Mariamne?
Knowest his doom, and yet can tell him of 't
With not so much as even one false note
In all thy soft voice-music?

Mar. Am I calm?
I think I'm mine own ghost; for I feel nothing
As I was wont to feel. I know the headsman,
And sent his wife a brew only this Nisan,
When she lay sick to death. There'll be no mis-stroke.
Thou art not feared, sir?

Hyr. No, my pretty one,
I am not feared of anything but life,
Now that I have made friends with Death. But, heart,
I'd say farewell unto our pretty boys.

Mar. I'll call them.

Alex. Devil! devil! Oh, this Herod! [*Exit.*
Lucifer were a paragon to him,
And Satan lovable.—O God! O God!
Instruct me how to demonize myself,
That I may meet him on equality
And curse him as a sister! Father, father,
Art thou asleep?

Hyr. Almost. I am fast drowsing
Unto the final moment, when my pillow
Shall be the block, and all my dreaming death.
Peace! peace! weep not.

Enter MARIAMNE, ALEXANDER, and ARISTOBULUS.

Ah, pretty ones, come here.
Thou lookest pale, my soldier. What's the matter?

Mar. He hath not yet recovered, dear Hyrcanus,
From witnessing his uncle's death.

Hyr. So! so!
Well, he must not see mine.

Alex. Oh, no! no! no!
No! no! no! no!

Hyr. There, there, my prince, thou shalt not.

Why, how thou tremblest! Look, I am to die,
And yet I tremble not.

Alex. I'd rather die
Ten thousand thousand times than see thee killed.
But then he cannot kill thee,—he cannot.
He is a devil, but he could not kill thee.
Say that he could not, mother,—mother, say it!
Oh, I did love him so! I loved him so!
And now, whenever I do think of him,
There is a shining redness comes between us—
Faugh!—and a smell of blood,—a thick, wet red,—
A damp, fresh, sickening, faint, far-reaching smell!
Oh, uncle! uncle!

Hyr. So! poor boy! poor boy!
And I must die?

Mar. Would I could die for thee!—
Who's there?

Enter Attendant and Herald.

Herald. Hyrcanus, thou art summonéd
To come straightway before the Sanhedrim.

Hyr. Then kiss me, pretty ones. Come close to me.
Nay, daughter, do not weep. Come, Mariamne.
Kneel for my blessing,—all of ye; kneel there,
Where I can touch ye. Nay, come closer yet.
The God of Israel forever keep ye,
As I would keep ye, were I Israel's God,—
Forever love, bless, guard, and cherish ye.
Don't weep; don't weep! I can no more, my heart.
Unloose this bracelet,—I have missed the clasp,—
Wear it, and think sometimes of him who wore it.
This for thee, boy,—and this for thee,—and this
For thee, my daughter; all that's left, for Death.
Don't tremble, Alexander! this poor body
Hath not sufficient blood to fill a goblet
To Herod's health. Farewell,—farewell,—farewell!

[ALEXANDRA swoons.]

What, daughter! wilt thou go before me? Why,
It is not like thee so to lack in deference.—
Look to her, sweet, and if in truth she's dead,
See that she be entombed with me. Farewell,—
Farewell,—farewell! Why, I am young again,
To think how soon I will be quit of age.
Lead on. Hyrcanus is once more a king,
And goes to meet King Death as equal! [*Exeunt HYRCANUS
and Attendant.*]

Mar. Father?—
Nay, let me not disturb him. Come, my boys,
Let's to thy father,—let's unto thy father
With this sweet news. Let's to him with our thanks.

Let's take him kisses,—ha! ha! ha!—such kisses!

Let's fall upon our knees to honor him.

Was ever such a father? Come, let's hurry!

Let's kiss, kiss, kiss, kiss, kiss him! Run! run! run!

[*Exit, running, leading her two boys by either hand.*]

SCENE III.—*A room in the palace.*

Enter HEROD and SALOME.

Her. Thou canst not swear that it was poisoned?

Sal.

No;

But can there be a doubt?

Her.

Ha!

Sal.

I repeat it,

Can there be any doubt? She knows too well

That thou art but her fancy's slave, her toy,

To brew thee merely love-potions.

Her.

Her slave?

I'll make thee slave to her! So? I a slave!

Thou hast a daring bent o' mind? Look thou!

Unless thou prove this love-brew poisonous,

Thou shalt in prison rot. As I am Herod,

I do believe thou'st lied from first to last

Concerning this affair and all that's touched it.

Thou art a most accomplished liar. Prove it,

Or I will make her ten times queen again,

And brand the hideous story of thy falseness

With red-hot irons on thy naked flesh,

Then have thee whipped through every street and by-way

Of all the towns in Jewry, that all men

May read of it! Away, and bring me proof,

Or look for death in agony unequalled!

[*Exit SALOME.*]

What if I've been deceived in everything

From then till now?

Enter MARIAMNE and boys.

What! Mariamne?

Mar.

Ay.

Who looks like Mariamne, save herself?

And these, sir, are her sons. She comes to thank thee—.

She and her sons—for thy last kindness to them.

Her. Wilt thou not sit? Here is a chair.

Mar.

Nay, Herod,

I'd have mine eyes at level with thine own;

And loving thanks are better proffered standing.

Her. Why so?

Mar. 'Tis hard to give thanks graciously.

Her. Not when 'tis Mariamne thanking Herod.

Mar. More than than ever.

Her.

Say'st thou?

Mar. Ay, my lord,—
More then than ever.

Her. Why, right well thou knowest
I'm always thankful to be thanked by thee.
Come, kiss me. For what wouldst thou thank me?

Mar. For
Hyrcanus' death! Nay, kiss me! I am sister
To Aristobulus. Nay, wilt not kiss me?
Thy treasurer Joseph loved me. Nay, now kiss me.
I am the grandchild of Hyrcanus!

Her. What! what! wilt thou dare?

Mar. Then thou'lt not kiss me? Haply
I am not looking fair enough to-day?
I'll have a robe dyed in Hyrcanus' blood,
And 'broidered richly with the hair of Joseph
And Aristobulus, to wear withal
When I would please thee. Come, a kiss,—a kiss.

Her. Devil!

Mar. Or, if that will not pleasure thee,
I'll make a feast for thee, and in thine honor
These thy two sons I'll have served up, with blood
For wine.

Her. Devil, I say!

Mar. Or, if that dish
Were something coarse for such a mighty king,
Their hearts alone I'd offer thee.

Her. God's heart!
Dost think I'll let thee live to mock me?

Mar. No:
Killing's thy forte. I pray thee send me, sir,
To Aristobulus, and Joseph, and Hyrcanus.
Haply thou hast some tender message, sir,
That I could bear them? 'Tis the only errand
On which for thee I would go willingly.
Come, send me,—send me.

Her. Can a man bear this
And not go mad?

Mar. Mad? Oh, no, thou'rt not mad.
I'm mad, the time is mad, earth, sea, heaven, hell,
The past, the future,—but not Herod! No!
He'll stand a monument to sanity
When for some excellent reason he hath slain
Everything save his reason!

Her. God in heaven!

Mar. Nay, God is not in heaven! If He were there,
Herod would not be here! He travels, sir;
There's a rebellion on some distant star,
And He hath gone to quell it.

Ay, in heaven
Thou know'st but these three souls, Hyrcanus, Joseph,

And Aristobulus. Cry out to them!

Cry out to them! cry out to them!

Her.

Thou darest?

Woman!

Mar. Ay,—to my woe. The wife of Herod
Should have by justice been a dragoness,
Giving birth to monsters that had murdered him,
Not unto men for him to murder.

Her.

Curse thee!

Mar. Curse me, didst say?—curse me? Now, as I live,
May everything that hath on every world
Since the creation, died, be resurrected
To curse thee with a separate curse! Oh, demon,
Thou'st found the core of sin and eaten it.
What! thou wouldst curse me? Am I not accursed
Sufficiently in having been thy wife?
Didst thou not curse me with a curse complete
When thou didst make me mother of thy sons?
Be thou accurséd, Herod, ay, accurséd,
Beyond thy utmost knowledge of a curse.
Forget that I once loved thee. Recollect
My hatred only. Thirst, thou shalt have blood,
And blood alone, to quench thy torment. Hunger,
Thou shalt not eat, but be thyself devoured.
Cry out to heaven, and thy prayers rebounding
Shall hurl thee into hell; while death to thee
Shall be one dream of life most horrible!

Her. Oh, God!

Mar.

Ay, tremble; for He hears not thee,
While Mariamne's curse is registered!

[*Exit.*

Her. What! Mariamne! Mariamne! Mariamne!
Return! Thou canst not hate me! No! no! no!
That's to be mad,—to say that Mariamne
Hates Herod. And I am not mad. I dreamed.
Then I am dead! She said that I would dream
Of life in death. Who said so? Mariamne?
No,—one who looked like her. Yet there is none—
Not one who looks like her, saving herself.
She said that, too. Her eyes! her eyes! her eyes!
They were two fires; they burned into my heart's core.
Nay, but my heart's a fire. My heart? What heart?
I gave my heart to Mariamne,—yea,
And she fed anger on it. Well, I'm glad,
I'm glad, in spite of all, that I'm not mad;
Else might I think all this had really happened;
And now I know I'm dreaming.

Enter SALOME.

Good Salome,
Wake me, I pray you. [*Aside.*] But that's foolish: ay,

She's part and parcel of my dream.—Good sister,
How come you in my dream?

Sal. What! art thou mad?

Her. No,—dreaming.

Sal. Why, that's madness on occasion.
Up! Rouse ye! rouse ye! Here's the potion.—Look!

Her. Is 't poisonous?

Sal. Ay.

Her. Then give it me.

Sal. For what?

Her. To drink.

Sal. Go to! Why, thou art mad in verity.

Her. Would that I were!

Sal. I say thou art.

Her. Then once

Thou bringest me welcome tidings.

Sal. Brother.

Her. Well?

Sal. What is the matter?

Her. Why, I'm mad, I hope.

Thou saidst that I was mad, but then, good sooth,

Thou art a famous liar lied about.

But look thou, there's a something in me, jade,

That whispers madmen may go madder.

Sal. Sir,

Rouse ye. Look here: this is the love-potion

That Mariamne brewed to kill thee.

Her. Ah!

Sal. If it be not a poison, I implore

That thou wilt torture me for pastime.

Her. How!—

To kill me?

Sal. Ay: who else? Wake up! wake up!

Her. Why, now, that's right. That is as I would have it.
I would not longer sleep.

Sal. Then rouse ye! Here,

Take 't in thy hand. There in thy palm thou holdest

What might have been thy death.

Her. Poison, thou sayest?

Sal. Ay, ay.

Her. And brewed by Mariamne?

Sal. Ay.

Her. By Mariamne for King Herod?

Sal. Ay.

All this thou knowest. Why wilt question me?

It is for thee to prove if I speak truth.

Her. And I will prove thee, monster! Ay, by heaven!

The dream is past, and Herod is awake,

To sleep no more!—Without, there!

Enter Attendant.

Send me straightway
A slave from out the workers in the vineyard.
Thou shalt be proved. Fear not: thou shalt be proved,—
In all,—in all. But then I am not mad,
If this is not a dream.—So! thou art come?

Enter Attendant and Slave.

Salome, here's thy proof,—a pretty proof.

—What is thy age?

Boy. A score of years, my lord.

Her. Dost thou hate life?

Boy. No, sire. Why should I hate it?
I'm very happy.

Her. Were 't not better, boy,
That thou shouldst part with it ere thou dost hate it?
Give me thy answer.

Boy. I know not, my lord.

Her. I know, and will decide for thee. Drink this.

Boy. [*Drinks.*] Unto thy health, sire.

Her. Ha!

Boy. Oh, God! what's this?—
—Water, I pray you. [*Dies.*]

Her. Thou art proved, Salome:—
Salome, thou art proved! I will believe thee
Though thou shouldst say thou never wast a liar!
Almost a merry death this would have been.
It scarce had loosed my crown or stirred my sceptre.
Look how he's stretched,—as easily, I wager,
As were he sleeping in the vineyard sunlight.
I am not sorry that he's dead. No! no!
He might have lived to be a Herod. Ay,
He might have lived to have a wife.

Sal. Come, rouse thee!
Wilt thou hang thus above a dead slave's body?
Away!

Her. For what?

Sal. For vengeance! Dost thou ask me,
And that thou mightst have been, there at thy foot?
Away! to bring the would-be murderess
To justice.

Her. No! let justice go to her!
I will not see her more, though we should live
A million years within our voices' sound!

Sal. Live! dost thou speak of life as possible
Unto that demon?—one who never loved thee?—
Who made thy love a means unto her ends?—
A traitress?—an adulteress?—Ay, thou'st said it!
Almost a murderess, quite one in heart?—
She who seduced thy sister's husband?—she——

Her. Enough ! enough ! thou hast named crimes sufficient
To make thyself seem holy in comparison !

Sal. Sir !

Her. Oh, be satisfied ; be satisfied :
She shall not live.

Sal. Now thou art Herod !

Her. No,
Now I'm a madman ! *[Exit, laughing.]*

Sal. And now I have conquered !
She is already 'prisoned, and I'll follow,
To see that she doth soon meet death ! *[Exit.]*

SCENE IV.—*A dungeon. MARIAMNE chained. Two guards, talking.*

1st Guard. She hath not said a word since I have watched her,
Nor moved. I have not seen her weep,—not once.

2d Guard. Believe you all that's said of her ?

1st Guard. Not I.

2d Guard. In thine ear, friend : I do suspect foul play.

1st Guard. Most like. Here comes the sister of the king.

Enter SALOME.

Sal. Slaves, where's the prisoner ?

1st Guard. There, madam.

Sal. Ah !

Good-morrow, madam. I do trust your queenship
Is in all things provided for ? Not so ?
What ! sulky ? Fie ! fie ! fie ! knit not thy brows.
I fear thou hast a temper, gentle queen.
A queen should not indulge in mortal passions.
And, by the way, if any ill befall thee,
I know 'twill comfort thee to think thy sons,—
Thy pretty sons,—Prince Aristobulus,—
The one who trod upon my robe,—rememberest ?—
And Alexander,—he who less resembles
My husband Joseph,—that into my charge
They will be given. Ha ! have I touched thee, harlot ?
What ! No word yet ? Well, thy blood speaks for thee :
It ne'er leaped readier to Herod's kisses
Than it doth to the words of Herod's sister.
Be honest, now : why didst thou lure my husband
From loyalty to me and to the king ?
'Twas madness. Ay, thou mightst have known I'd trace it.
Come, now ; speak. Tell me. Didst thou truly love him,
Or was 't mere wantonness ? Nay, do not die,
Of rage, before thy time,—thy time's so near,
Ha ! ha ! so near,—so near. Well, of thy sons
I'll promise thee one thing.

Mar. What ?

Sal. Ah ! thou speakest !

Thou art not dumb, as I began to fear?
I'll promise thee one thing,—but one, though.

Mar.

Well,

What is it?

Sal. Patience! patience!

Mar.

What is it?

Sal. I will not cuff them more than twice a day.

Ha! ha! ha! ha! Have care,—have care, good girl!
Thou'lt die, if thou so giv'st thy fury vent.

Mar. Joseph! Joseph! Joseph! rise from thy grave
And blast this devil with thy festering horror!
Leap to her arms all headless as thou art,
And venge my wrongs: I, Mariamne, summon thee,
Who was and am the Queen of Jewry!

Sal.

Fiend!

Mar. [*Breaking loose and seizing SALOME.*]

O God! Make me the tool to venge his murder!
Off, cords! Be brittle as all joy! Off! off!—
Ha! wilt speak more of cuffing?

Sal.

Help, there! ho!

The queen is mad! Help! help! The queen is mad!

Mar. One other cry, and thou shalt stand straightway
Face unto face with thy wronged husband's ghost.
Ay, presently I mean to send thee to him,
No matter what thou doest. Dost thou hear me?
First cry me pardon, though,—pardon, dost hear?—
And then to bloody Joseph!

Sal.

Hold thy hands!

Thou'rt choking me.

Mar.

Presently,—but not yet.

My pardon.

Sal.

Thou art mad! Well, pardon,—pardon.

Now let me go.

Mar. [*Stabbing her.*] Ay, unto Joseph! So!
Know'st thou this dagger? I return it to thee!

Sal. [*Swoons.*] Oh! I am killed!

Enter Guards.

1st Guard. Oh, heaven! what's this?

2d Guard.

We will be put to death.

Mark how she bleeds.

1st Guard.

Softly! she is but wounded.

2d Guard. Did the queen do it?

1st Guard.

Ay, she must have.

2d Guard.

Look!

She's stiller, sir, than ever.

1st Guard.

Well,—I know not,—

Mayhap the princess killed herself.

2d Guard.

Soft! soft!

She moves. She is not dead. Come on, sir ; come.

[*Exeunt, bearing SALOME out.*]

Mar. [*Staring at the blood left from SALOME's wound upon the floor.*]

Why, her blood's red, like any other woman's !
I had thought it would be black,—black as her soul,—
As Herod's.

Enter SARAMALLAS and SOHEMUS.

Sar. Look, friend, how she stares !

Soh. In truth,
There's something here—— What ! blood ? Look, Saramallas !

Sar. 'Tis blood, assuredly. Look to the queen :
She may have stabbed herself.

Soh. Would God she had !

Sar. Ay, Sohemus, Amen with all my heart.
Was his command to kill her final ?

Soh. Final.

Sar. And must she die ? Is there no way ?—not one ?

Soh. Thou knowest well that I would die to save her.

Sar. And thou'rt to take a napkin to the king
Dipped in her blood ?

Soh. Oh, speak not of it, man !

I love my mistress, and would kill ten Herods
Rather than look to see one single hair
Of her bright head disturbed.

Sar. Well, 't must be done.—
Your majesty, the Sanhedrim——

Mar. I know,
I know, good Saramallas.—Sohemus,
Good-morrow. It is well. I care not now.
She's dead : my sons are safe. Thou, Sohemus,
Protect them all that's in thy power from Cypros.
Yet I do not much fear her, now the power
That urged her is subdued. Good Sohemus,
Cypros without Salome is a hell
Without a devil. See they say their prayers,
And do not break the Sabbath with their games,
And letter-cutting on the lintels. Nay,
Thou wast a boy, and know how boys will do it,—
Even the gentlest.—Well, I'm ready. Come.

Soh. Oh, mistress well beloved and always loving,
Thou knowest that I'd rather suffer death
Ten thousand times than see thee even unhappy.

Mar. Yea, friend, even so. But once to suffer death
Is nevermore to suffer anything.
Therefore rejoice with me, whose not-long life
Hath been so full of pain, I would not purchase
Another day of life were 't purchasable
For the mere asking. I will bear thy love

To Joseph. Nay, no tears, good Sohemus.
 Mine eyes are dry as are these breasts of mine,
 Which once did nourish princes. Cease, I pray thee.
 I'll walk alone, a queen unto the last.

[*Exit.*]

SCENE V.—*Enter* HEROD.

What! she prepare a poison for me! Oh,
 Foul! foul! She, Mariamne?—she, my queen?
 Nay, she was Joseph's wanton, not my queen.
 Was not that vile? But thus to seek my life,—
 That's viler. No, not that: to slay my honor,—
 That was more vile. And yet she might have known it,—
 That I would pardon her. But she must die,—
 She must die now. Die? Mariamne? Nay,
 He who doth spill a drop of her rare blood
 Shall kill his best-belovéd for my pleasure
 Upon a holiday! What! die? Her lips,
 That I so oft have kissed, to rot i' th' tomb
 Like any beggar's? What! an end of all?
 All our soft hours, our million-pleasured years,—
 Even our quarrelling? And yet, and yet,—
 She plotted for my death. Soft! is that sure?
 Soft, soft,—Salome! But I saw him die—
 Die, with these very eyes. Oh, God! I care not:
 One kiss would make a thousand deaths seem easy,
 And there's no poison like to fruitless yearning!
 I care not what she purposed, I'll forgive her,—
 I will forgive her, and be writ forever
 Herod the happy fool of Mariamne!
 Ay, ay, a happy fool is wise in all things
 Above the sourest knowledge-wrinkled seer
 That scoffs at him! Yes, yes, I will forgive her,
 And teach her not to hate me. [*Enter* SOHEMUS.]

Ay, sir, thou,—

Thou art the very man I seek. Good Sohemus,
 Attend. I did speak rashly to thee, friend,
 Some moments past.

Soh.

Rashly, my lord?

Her.

Ay, Sohemus.

There is a burning here doth sometimes urge me
 To violence whose half I do not mean.
 I gave thee orders which I would retract,—
 I would retract.

Soh.

For God's sake, Herod, speak!

Her. Why, what's the matter? Here, sir! wouldst thou
 swoon?

What is the matter? I would have the queen
 Set free again. Dost hear?

Soh.

The queen is free.

Ay, Herod, she hath soared beyond thy reach
Forever. Here's the kerchief thou commanded'st
That I should dip in her warm blood.

Her. Thou liest !

What ! dost thou dare to show me that vile rag
And say 'tis stained with Mariamne's blood ?

Soh. Ay, Herod : I have but obeyed thy order.

Her. Dog, thou dost lie ! Who put thee to this trick ?
Where is Salome ? She hath hired thee to it.
Speak, sir ! Where is she ?

Soh. Wounded unto death.

The poor queen, frenzied by her coward taunts,
Did burst her bonds and stab her nigh to death.

Her. The poor queen ? What poor queen ? What dost thou
hint ?

Dost dare speak thus of Mariamne ? Go !

Bid her unto me. Bid her here, I say.

Away !

Soh. Nay, Herod, be convinced. Thy queen
No longer lives : that blood is hers indeed,
And I the most unhappy man on earth !

Her. Dost thou dare say thou art, when Herod's here ?
Thou most unhappy ? Thou ? O dog, dog, dog !
Would thou hadst twenty lives, that I might take them
Each in a different way ! She's dead, thou say'st ?
And that's her blood ? Back to her with this message :
" My chief fault was obedience ; and Herod,
Being a madman, killed me for obeying."

[*Runs SOHEMUS through with his sword.*

Soh. I'm glad to go to her. Thou hast done well. [*Dies.*

Her. That Mariamne's blood ? Oh, God ! let redness
Possess the earth, the heavens forswear their blue,
The sea its green ! ay, let the very stars
Put on her color, and burn bloodily
To do her honor ! I will build a pyramid
Unto her memory, and its littlest stone
Shall twice outsize Cheops' entirety ;
While for a mortar I will mix the dust
Of emperors dead with blood of living kings !
To work ! to work ! for earth's foundation-stone
Must be the first in the tremendous pile ! [*Exit madly.*

Enter two or three attendants, running.

1st Att. Was 't not the king ?

2d Att. I'm sure I heard him.

3d Att.

Ay,

And so am I ; but he's not here. Look there !
Is 't not Lord Sohemus ?

1st Att.

Ay,—dead, I think.

2d Att. Alas! alas! He had the kindest heart
In all of Jewry.

1st Att. So he had; and heaven
Now hath his soul. Let's bear him hence. Come on.
[*Exeunt, bearing the body of SOHEMUS.*]

SCENE VI.—*Another part of the palace.*

Enter HEROD and ALEXANDER.

Her. Boy, where's thy mother? Where's thy mother, boy?
Speak, boy: I will not hurt thee. Look, I'm gentle,—
I am not angry. Look, I'll throw my sword
After my crown. Thou seest I recollect it,—
Thy insolent waggery,—ha! ha!—and yet am gentle.
Thou seest? Come, then, my pretty prince. Look here:
This ring for thee. Now tell me, where's thy mother?

Alex. In heaven, where thou'lt never be, vile king.
Call me no more sweet names; for I do hate thee!—
Hate thee!—hate thee!

Her. What's that, thou devil? Ha!
She taught thee that.

Alex. She never taught me anything
But what was good; nor could I teach myself
A better way of honoring her memory
Than by abhorring thee!

Her. Devil!

Alex. I tell thee,
Thou'lt be thrice damned, if after killing her
Thou seek'st to kill her honor! Slay me! do!
I'm not afraid. Thou'st thrown away thy sword;
Then take thy hands. I ask no more, by heaven,
Than to be sent to her!—Oh, mother! mother!

Her. Where is she, then? Where is she? Tell me that,
And thou shalt go to her. Don't weep; don't weep.
Look, I am sorry if I called thee devil.
Look,—for thou'lt see what no man saw ere this,—
Herod a pardon-beggar. Look,—I'm sorry.

Alex. Go beg of God; for I have naught to give thee
Save only hate. [Exit.]

Her. Now know I thou'rt his son!
No! no! no! no! I did not mean it! Oh,
Return, return, my son, my Alexander,
My son and hers! Or if that thou dost hate me,
Be a dear hypocrite, and feign to love me!
What's that, though? Soft! if one may feign to love,
May not one feign to hate? Might she not so?
She doth not hate me: no, she hath but feigned it,—
This hatred,—that I may her love more value
When she confesses it.—Without, there! ho!

Enter Attendants.

Sirs,—bid the queen at once attend me. Quick !
Why do ye stand there as though death had gripped ye ?
Summon the queen at once !

Att. What queen, my lord ?

Her. What queen, dog ? Wilt thou give me back my words ?
What queen ? Know that there is one only queen
In Herod's catalogue. Call Mariamne,
The Queen of Jewry ; bid her come to me
Here o' the instant. Oh, away with ye !

[Exeunt Attendants.]

Now shall all nights to this night be as leaves
From Wisdom's tree, unto its golden fruit,—
As sparks to stars,—as stars unto God's crown !
Let some new God be born to conquer heaven,
Dethrone Jehovah, and create new worlds
For that prince who shall some day live as proof
Of this night's wonder. Mariamne, come !
I'll shake the stars from out their blackened sockets
To light our bridal bed ; the choir of heaven
Shall chant us to our sleep ; and for thy coverlet
Thou shalt the mantle of God's glory. Shout,
Ye tempest-riding spirits ; earth, give voice ;
Resound, ye forests, like to harps ; let ocean
Her cymbal-clashing waves send unto heaven
And sweep down echo from the halls of Zeus !
Yea, let hell on the forehead of this night
Be bound as torch to light our ecstasy !

Re-enter Attendants.

So, sirs ! Where is the queen ?

Att. Thou must know, sire——

Her. Must know ? Is that an answer for thy king ?
Call me Queen Mariamne from the doors.
Call her, I say.

Att. Oh, sire, the queen is dead.
She was beheaded full an hour ago.

Her. Damned be thy lying tongue ! Away ! away !
Or I will go myself to summon her ! *[Exit Attendants.]*
Beheaded ? Mariamne ? There was blood,—
Ay, there was blood,—but there's no sign in that.
A lamb's blood might stand proxy for a queen's,
And no one know the difference. Dead ? Dead ?
Were God to say it, I'd cry God a liar !
Stay ! something comes to me,—something comes back.
I did commission Sohemus——The napkin——
Oh, God ! it was her blood, and she is dead !
O Mariamne, Mariamne, Mariamne !
What am I who have slain thee ? Lucifer


Is holy unto Herod, for in truth
He was sin's victim, I the king of vice !
Beheaded ? God ! was there no other way
But death must roll that proud head on the ground
As children roll a ball ? What ! do I live,
And Mariamne dead ? What ! am I Herod,
And Mariamne slain at my command ?—
That Herod whom men call the Great ? Just God !
Herod the Great ? Ay ! Herod the great in sin !
[*Falls forward on his face.*

Amélie Rives.

THE END.

A FEW MORE WORDS ABOUT MISS RIVES.

IN literature, as in life, the candor of innocence is sometimes mistaken for that of intentional impurity. But our deception with regard to it is apt to be very short-lived, and is usually resultant from our own blunt or languid vision. I confess that a second reading of Miss Rives's remarkable story "The Quick or the Dead?" has made it evident to me just where the cause of the whole misunderstanding has lain; for there seems to be no doubt that in this work she has offended the tastes of readers whom her "Farrier Lass o' Piping Pebworth" and other tales of a like beauty and freshness had forcibly charmed. Miss Rives has steeped a love-story in realism, acted on by some peculiar force of her time, without stopping to consider what dangers, with a writer of her strongly romantic trend, must surround any such literary exploit, unless a good deal of discriminative caution be made to accompany it. But caution of this kind does not usually consort with authors of youth and inexperience. Had Miss Rives been commencing her career as a novelist about a half-century ago, she would have painted the episodes between Barbara and her lover in hues that no one would have found too glaring. But being inevitably a child of the period, she has told a modern story in the modern manner. Now, as it chanced, she had an extremely difficult story for a young writer to tell. It was one which George Sand would have delighted to deal with in French; it involved the question as to just how far human love is a physical magnetism and just how far it is an attraction of that finer and subtler sort which even materialists, for want of a better descriptive term, must call "spiritual." This whole *donnée* is one of surpassing dramatic interest, and worthy to be treated by the greatest writers of fiction. Still, the appeal is constantly being made to Barbara through those fleshly qualities possessed by the man who so marvellously resembles her adored dead husband. Early in the work it is said of the heroine, on her first meeting with this extraordinary counterfeit presentment, "She began to think that she was in a dream,—the figure, the step, the pose, were so identically her husband's; but the greatest shock of all was when he spoke." In the very next line we learn that when he did speak "the voice was Val's voice." This living likeness of Barbara's husband is his cousin, and claims promptly a cousin's intimate privileges. They two are incessantly alone together in a great old Virginian homestead. He is filled with youthful vigor and fire, and almost hourly finds himself growing more and more in love with his kinsman's widow. She is a woman whose temperament has an almost tropical ardor, and whom we can imagine performing scarcely a single act in life without giving it the florid hues of her own rather theatric personality. Miss Rives means her for a very emotional being, and so she is; but her mentality is limited in an unfortunate degree, considering the numerous tempting opportunities with which she is presented by her creator for behaving in a silly fashion, and which she constantly embraces.



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